

You're Not Alone by **playfulelectrodes**

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Summary: This takes place right after El closes the gate. Multi-chapter adventure that involves a journey for not only El, but everyone else, as she tries to figure out what family and home means to her. I want to apologize to all who have been reading this story and my late chapters. I got a virus on my computer and for some reason couldn't get onto this website for some time.

1. Chapter 1

Mike sat in the back seat of the car as Steve drove them back. They had done the best that they could with what they had, but as Mike stared down at his dirt covered hands, he wondered if there was something else that needed to be done. For all they knew, El and Hopper didn't make it. The demi-dogs could have eaten them alive, El could have fallen back into the upside down, or the amount of power she used could have drained her dry.

"I think she's okay," Max's voice made Mike jump. She sat next to him in the middle seat; Lucas on the other side of her. Her red hair was frizzed out, and just like him, her body was covered in dirt. They all still wore their cloths and bandana's around their necks, but had discarded their goggles and gloves in the trunk of the car before leaving.

"What makes you so sure," Mike asked quietly. He took a glance out the window, watching houses as they passed by; houses filled with people who hand no idea what was happening in their town.

"Because it's El," Max said. Mike turned his head to look at her. "She's the mange, right? She's supposed to be incredible." Mike let a slight smile appear onto his face, Max did the same.

"You're okay Zoomer," Mike said before looking back out of the window. Max stared for a brief second in shock before turning her gaze to the front of the car.

"Okay gang," Steve announced to the car as he pulled up the Byers house. "We are not going anywhere. There will be no leaving of any kind until we get the all clear." Steve stared at Dustin in the seat next to him, then into the review mirror. No one moved to leave as he stopped the car; every one sat in their place and stared at the house. Mike looked around the outside of the car, not seeing any sign of Nancy, and no sign of Hopper.

"Do you think your brothers still in there?" Lucas said, leaning in closer to Max. She shrugged her shoulder while letting the thought strike fear into her.

"He better not be," Dustin said back. "Steve here will kick his ass this time."

"Yeah, alright," Steve said in a dry voice. "Everyone out, we need to clean ourselves up before the others get back. My ass in grass if they find out we left." Everyone moved to unbuckle their seat belts, Max followed Lucas out of the other side of the car, while Mike slowly stood out with the help of Steve.

"Do you really think she did it," Steve asked Mike in a low voice, as everyone else moved toward the house. Mike slammed the car door, looking at his reflection on the car window. He look like he had aged faster within the past two days, his hair seemed longer, and it almost seemed like he looked like a lanky teenager, and not some lanky little kid.

"Yeah, I do," he said before moving to the house. "She promised she would come back, and I'm going to hold her to that promise." Steve followed him up the front steps; the other three had left the door wide open. The place Billy laid was empty. The only sign that he was there was the destruction he left behind.

"Maybe we should clean up a little bit," Dustin said looking around the room. "I'm sure Ms. Byers would like to come home to a clean house." Lucas grabbed the broom he had been using before Billy had come. Max took the dust pan, following him around the room as they cleaned the floor of glass. Dustin put things back on shelves, straightened cushions on the couch, and making sure blood from the demi-dog was cleaned from the corner of the floor. Steve stayed in the kitchen, first rearranging things back into their rightful place; then turning on the faucet to wet a cloth so he could clean out the cuts on his face.

"Whose idea was it to stick these rainbow band aids on me?" Steve yelled from the kitchen.

"We thought they would make you feel better," Dustin yelled back. Mike walked across the room, looking down at the trophy he had been holding as the demi-dogs approached the house. He went to the shelf across the room where it had been sitting; putting it back in its place. *First Place Science Fair*, it read. The science fair from two years

ago.

All four of them created an entire replica of the human brain, marking down every detail of every section they knew. They had worked days to get the material right, to make it look like an actual brain. It had been Will's idea to take blood from the meat Mike's mom was making upstairs and pour it all over the plastic they had used from coke bottles. Will's mom was so proud when they had gotten the trophy.

Car head lights shined into the room, making Mike look up from his thoughts. He rushed to the door to see who it was, and even though he was grateful to see his sister, he was slightly disappointed. He watched as Johnathan helped Will out of the car, as Nancy ran up the steps on the front porch; pulling him into a hug.

"Why are you so dirty?" She asked. She pulled at the cloth around his neck, giving him concerned eyes.

"Umm," Mike said. "We might have done a few stupid things while you were gone." Nancy let out a sigh before taking him back into her arms.

"You're so stupid," she said into his hair.

"Yeah well, you are too," Mike said back with a smile. "Have you heard from Hopper?"

"The last thing that was said to them was to close the gate. It's been radio silent since." Nancy looked down at her brother, her eyes covered in moisture, trying not to cry.

"She'll come back," He said to her, she nodded her head before moving them out of the way. Will slowly moved up the steps, black circles rimmed his eyes, and his body was still dripping with sweat. "You did it," Mike said to him, moving in front of him and grabbing his hands. He helped him up the steps, slowly guiding him through the front door. "You beat the beast like we knew you would." Will gave a slight smile as Mike eased him into the couch. Max, Lucas and Dustin gathered around them, looking down at Will.

"That was the hardest game of D&D I've ever played," Will said with a tired smile. The group laughed lightly, Will moved to lay down on the couch, letting out a sigh.

"How about you boys go into the kitchen and start on some tea," Joyce said from the front door. "Give Will some space to rest." Every one gave him a slight pat or a smile before leaving, going into the dark kitchen with Steve icing his face.

"What happened to you," Nancy asked loudly. Johnathan moved by the front of the kitchen while holding Will in his arms, looking at Steve in surprise before slipping into the hallway.

"It's a long story," He said back to her, before slipping into a chair at the dinner table.

"Is you guys leaving here, and doing something stupid a long story too?" She asked him with more force. Steve let out a sigh looking down at the table.

"I didn't have much of a choice, okay Nans? I was kidnapped and taken as hostage."

"By a couple of kids?" She said back.

"Teenagers," Dustin said as he took a seat across from Steve. "By a couple of teenagers." Dustin gave a big smile to Nancy, Mike smiled slightly. They sat in silence for a couple of seconds, before hearing the sounds of tires on the gravel drive way. Mike perked up, moving quickly from his place in the kitchen to the front door.

Hopper jumped out of his Bronco, walking quickly to the other side of the car and opening the passenger door. Mike ran down the steps, reaching him in three big strides.

"Is she okay," he said in a panic. Hopper took El into his arms. Blood was drying from her nose; blood was falling from her ears. Her eyes weren't open, but he could tell that she had been crying.

"Let's get her inside kid," Hopper said. They moved forward fast, Mike going in first to keep the door open. Hopper placed her down on the couch, moving to take off her jacket. Nancy came in with a wet

washcloth, kneeling beside Hopper as she started to clean her face. "She just fell asleep in the car. She was too tired to even walk out of the lab, I've never seen anything like it." He said in disbelief. Hopper moved to her feet, taking off her shoes. "The way she closed it, I thought she was going to die for a second; like she was going to drain herself of everything that she had."

"Was she able to say anything afterwards?" Mike asked, walking to the end of the couch where her head laid. "Did she say she was okay, did she says she felt okay?"

"I don't know kid," Hopper said. Hopper threw her shoes and socks onto the floor, standing to look at Mike. "She nearly passed out, she couldn't stand, but she cried for a little bit as we left everything behind."

"Maybe we should think about getting her in a bath," Nancy said. "Get her some clean clothes so she can be comfortable."

"Your right," Hop said. "I'll go start the tub, you find her some clothes." They both looked back down at her before leaving Mike alone with her. He knelled beside her head, watching as she took in deep breaths.

He didn't realize he had been crying until a tear fell onto his arm. He let out a gasped breath, trying to muffle his cries as he looked at her.

"I knew you would come back," he whispered to her.

"I promised," she mumbled back quietly.

"El?" he looked down at her, she let out a slight moan before scrunching up her face. He placed his hand on her cheek; she leaned into it. "Sleep El, you need it."

"Mike," she said slightly louder. "I wanted to say something, but I wasn't aloud."

"I know," Mike said sadly. "Let's not focus on that right now. Hoppers starting a bath for you, and Nancy is getting you some clean clothes. Everything's going to be okay. I'll be here when you wake up."

"Promise?"

"I Promise," He said back.

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She was grateful; a word that she learned on day 191. The time she cried for her friends and Hop told her to be grateful for what she had in that moment. She could still be out in the snow, eating large rodents over a poorly lit fire. She had a bed, food, and an old teddy bear Hop told her to take care of, as he hesitantly passed it to her.

She was grateful for the warm water, because as Joyce poured it down her head, she could feel the grease and grime trickle down her body. She was still too tired to open her eyes, and moving her muscles made her body ache. Every time she tried to swallow her throat would ignite on fire, and it made her groan.

"It's okay honey," Joyce said as she scrubbed some of her arm. She could feel Nancy at her feet, scrubbing the sweat from her legs. "You're almost done, and then we can get you into a bed." A bed, the most exciting word she had heard in days. A bed that she would feel safe in, a bed that felt like home.

"Do you mind if I stay tonight?" Nancy said.

"Stay as long as you would like," Joyce said back. "I'm sure Jonathan could use the help, he doesn't talk much so I'm sure having you here will help." Silence remained, and for a few passing moment El felt herself going back to sleep, as Joyce rubbed shampoo into her hair. The next thing she remembered was half sitting on the toilet top, and half leaning on the wall while Joyce and Nancy attempted to fit clothing over her body. She would feel embarrassed, but at this point she didn't care.

"Alright," she heard Hop say as he lifted her into his arms.

"Take her to my bed," Joyce said from behind them. She could feel the cold sheet on her feet, and she could smell the soap in her curly hair. Hope tucked the blanket in under her, giving her a small kiss on her head. An act that she had never felt before from the man, but was

pleasantly surprised by how it made her feel. It wasn't like a kiss from Mike, but it gave her a different kind of comfort she wasn't used to feeling. "Sleep tight kid," He said quietly. "And you," He said a little bit loudly as he straightened away from her. "I'm trusting you with no funny business."

"Seriously," she heard Mikes voice. "I'm not going to do anything." She heard Hopper heavy footsteps move through the room, saying seriously under his breath. The door creaked, half shut, and Mike's quiet foot falls came to stand next to her. "I promise to be here when you wake up Eleven." He said at a whisper. She felt the side of her bed cave as he took a seat next to her, then everything went still.

It was a familiar place to be. In the black landscape, and the watered floor. She could never feel her wet feet, but had frozen toes when she would wake from her day dreams. An echo of someone's panicked breaths filled her ears, as she turned in circles to find the source of the noise.

"No!" the voice screamed, she walked straight forward, seeing a dot of a person in the distance. A girls voice, screaming in pain. El could see her sitting in a chair, her arms restrained by rope on the chair. The girls head was bold, like hers had been so long ago. Her features were older, but only by a few more years, and blood fell from her dark brown eyes.

"Tell me," the voice made El freeze in place. The voice of a man she had nightmares of every time she closed her eyes. "Tell me where she is," He came around from behind El, walking in front of the girl. He leaned over her taking a handkerchief from his pocket and whipping the blood from her eyes.

"I can't see anything," the girl cried. El kept her eyes of Papa, his feature darker than they were the last time she had seen him. She felt anger rise in her, realizing that he wasn't as dead as he though she was.

"You're lieing," he sneered. "I know you can find her." The girl let out another cry as he raised his hand, slapping her with force across her face. "Find her!"

El couldn't keep her breathing in check, she felt a panic rise in her. The girl closed her eyes, taking in a deep breath as a red flare built on the side of her right cheek. They sat in silence for just a minute, until the girl

raised her head a little high, opening her eyes to look straight at El.

They stared at one another, El not know what she was supposed to do. There was a connection she felt between her and the girl. Warmth wrapped around her body that she had never felt before, and she could feel a tingle on her right cheek, a slap she had never reserved, but could feel.

"Where is she," Papa interrupted. The girl turned her gaze to Papa, her eyes narrowing in anger.

"No!" She screamed as loud she could. She struggle in her chair, pulling her arms in hopes to escape the pain of the rope restraints. El began to panic again, the warmth that was there leaving quickly. She looked down at the girl from where she stood, she search her arm for a number to identify her.

Her left arm was red the chaffing from the rope. A small tattoo sat on her arm reading, 001, making El take a step back. Her eyes began to bleed again. Her body was thrashing in peer panic, El slowly backed up.

Papa raised his hand again, striking down on the girl right cheek. "You're lieing to me!" The girls cry echoed around the darkness, the sound of water dripping as El took quick steps back, She wanted to wake up, she didn't want to be there anymore.

She put her hands to her ears, the sound of the girl screaming making her mind fuzzy, her ears were hurting. El turned in her place, looking away from the scene in front of her, and began to run. She ran into the darkness, not knowing where she was going, or how to wake up.

"El?" she stopped in her tracks. Looking around for the source of the echoed voice. "El," Mike's voice rang. She turned left and right, not able to find him. "El." She turned around, as he stood behind her looking down at an empty bed.

"Mike?" she said, before opening her eyes.

She had forgotten how bright the sun could be, and at this moment it was so bright that it made her eyes shoot a sharp pain into her head. She could feel Mike's arms on her shoulders as she looked around the

room. Trying to remember how she got there and what was happening.

"It's okay," Mike said. "It was just a dream." He took a seat next to her, letting her sit up a little more. She felt a slight dizziness take over her as her stomach made a mean growl. "Ms. Byers is making some food right now. I'm not sure if its breakfast or lunch, we all kind of slept in late.

El took a moment to just look at him, at how he had more pronounced features than the last time she saw him. How his hair was getting longer and messier, and how his chin was slightly more aligned with his face. Mike grabbed her hand as they stared at one another.

"I missed you," she said quietly. Her voice came out scratchy, hurting her.

"I missed you so much," Mike said. "I knew you were there, but sometimes, I don't know, it felt like I had really lost you. Like you died and wouldn't come back."

"I wanted to come back," she said sadly. "I was alone." Mike squeezed her hand, frowning at her words. She could feel a tear fall from her eyes. "I couldn't leave, I couldn't open windows or doors, and all I had was the T.V." she let in a staggered breath letting the tears fall from her eyes. She looked up into Mikes face; an anger sat inside him that she hadn't really seen before.

"I really want to be mad," Mike Said. "I just, know he did it out of caring, and that without Hop you could have been found. He was trying to protect you." Mike lowered his head slightly. "I only knew you for a week, but once you were gone, it was like I lost half of myself. How is that possible?" El looked at him in confusion. "You don't have to answer that question," he said. "Sometimes talking out load helps me."

"Like talking to yourself?" Mike raised his head at her, a slight smile playing on his lips.

"Yeah," he said. "Sometimes when you think out loud, it helps you

better understand certain situations. Like, when I don't get something in science, I just talk out loud about it and then I start to understand. It's all about how your brain works."

"Brain?" she asked.

"Yeah," Mike said back. "Your brain is right here," Mike brought his finger up to her head. "It's an organ in your body; it's what keeps you alive." El took her hand to her head. "It's where you store all your thoughts, and it tells your body all these different things; like when you're hungry, or when something hurts." Mike put his hand to her right cheek. "Where you hit?" he asked inspecting her face.

She could almost feel the hand print of a slap, and she could feel her heart race a little fast as she thought of her dream. Before she could open her mouth to explain, Hopper came into the room; Mike quickly took his hand off of her.

"What did I say before," He said angrily looking at Mike. El looked at Hopper with a mix emotion of confusion and anger. She didn't understand the force he used toward Mike, but knew she shouldn't like it.

"Sorry," Mike said lowly, standing from his place on the bed and walking towards the windows.

"Are you good to stand kid," He asked walking to her side of the bed. She nodded her head slowly, moving the blanket from her body and looking down at her pajama bottoms. "Don't worry, Joyce and Nancy changed you last night, no one else saw. Let's go," he brought his hands in front of her. She took them, slowly standing and wincing at the stinging pain in her muscles. Mike watched from a distance placing his arms across his chest.

"Breakfast," she asked.

"I know breakfast if your favorite kind of food, but for now you are going to have to settle for some lunch." She let out a sigh, letting her warm toes get used to the cold wood on the floor. "It won't be that bad, no T.V. dinners if that's what you're thinking." He turned and pointed Mike out the door, who doesn't move until he sees El take a

few steps. She followed behind him, listening to everyone in the front room talking amongst one another.

She couldn't make it through the hall way and into the front room. The strong smell of warm food made her gravitate to the kitchen, Where Joyce and Steve placed different plates filled with food onto the table. Miss matched chairs filled the room, one for every person, and El took her place in front of the mashed potatoes.

"Let me help you with that," Joyce said as she grabbed her plate and started placing meats, veggies, and the potatoes onto the plate. Mike sat down next to her, he looked her way and smiled, but all she could think about with filling her stomach as much as she could.

"This looks great," Dustin said loudly taking the seat next to her. "I could eat a cow," he rubbed his hands together with a smile.

"Cow?" she asked, slightly discussed.

"You know," Dustin said, taking his own plate and putting food onto it. "Like the thing people say when their really hunger. I'm so hungry I could eat a horse!" Joyce put the plate down in front of her; El stared at everything she had been given. She looked at the meat; it looked like the meat that came in her T.V. dinners, but better.

"Horse?" she said pointing to her meat.

"No, that's chicken," Mike said, as he started to grab his own food. "Trust me you'll like it."

Lucas came to sit next to Dustin, rubbing his hands in excitement and Max took the seat next to him. They both took food at the same time, while the others found their places. Hopper sat across from her, and as she looked around she couldn't find Will.

"You should be eating food," Hopper said from across the table pointing his fork at her plate. She looked down at her food, and then at everyone else eating. She grabbed her fork and ate as fast as she could. "And we should be using those table manners I told you about," El looked at her food, and heard Mike sniff with a smile. She looked over at him while he took a big bight of potato's smiling.

She had never tasted something so filling and great. The amount of warm food in her stomach made her feel happy, but also tired.

"I think now would be the time to discuss with you guys what is going to happen." Everyone stopped to look at Hopper. "I took the liberty to call every single one of your parents; they think you have been her to support Will. Most of you already told them that you were here, but Max," Max stopped eating, looking down at her plate. "Your mom was freaking out, so I don't know if me telling her anything was going to calm her down." El looked over at her, wondering what she must be like. "Once we are done eating, everyone is to go home, and act like nothing happened. You," he said pointing to El, "Are going to come back with me to the cabin." El slammed her fork down, the entire room went still.

"I'm not going back," she said. "I will not go back." She could feel anger rising in her. She had just gotten them back; she wasn't going to be taken away again.

"You and I have a lot of cleaning up to do," He said sticking more food into his mouth. "I don't know if you remember this, but you left when you shouldn't have. You went out into the world, went to places I don't even know yet, and talk to strangers in their big trucks. We have to do damage control." El slammed her fists into the table and every one jumped. She stood from her seat, letting the chair fall behind her. Mike dropped his fork, putting his hand on her arm.

"I will not go back," she said through tears. Hopper looked angrily down at his food and huffed. He picked at his potatoes with his fork, looking back up to her.

"We need to talk about where you have been. Where you went after you saw your mother, who you talked to. Do you not remember there are people looking for you?"

"Papa," she said quietly.

"Yes, people like your papa," El took her chair and placed it back in her spot, sitting down and looking at her food.

"Chicago," she said.

"What?" Hopper said back.

"Chicago, that's where I went; to meet my sister." she looked around the room, Joyce held an expression of confusion, while Mike turned his whole body to face her.

"Okay," Hopper said slowly. "And did you find her?"

"There were dirty people, with no homes. She lived in a big building with picture on the walls, and was with friends with funny hair and dark cloths."

"You hung out with homeless people in Chicago?" Dustin said in disbelief. Mike reached over El and slapped him on the arm. "Ow" he said, giving Mike a dirty look.

"What else happened," Mike asked eagerly.

"She was like me, with a tattoo on her arm, a number 8. They were using guns to kill the bad men, and they wanted my help to find them."

"They wanted you to help them murder?" Mike asked.

"Murder?" she asked in confusion.

"Like taking a life in cold blood," Lucas said. "Like pointing a gun at someone and killing them. Did you kill someone?"

"No, I couldn't." El looked down at her hands in her lap. "He had kids," she said quietly. She heard Joyce take in a breath, and Hopper grumble quietly. "I almost did it, but I couldn't, and I couldn't let her."

"So," Hopper said. "You went all the way to Chicago, met someone who is like you, and almost killed one of the bad men, but didn't. Now he knows that you are out there, he has seen your face and knows you were at least in Chicago." Hopper put his hands to his face, while Joyce rubbed circles on his back.

"It's like you tried to hit all the check marks on the things you shouldn't be doing," Steve said from across the room.

"Steve," Nancy said in annoyance.

"What? She literally went to one of them and showed them that she's alive. That's like one of the worst things she could do right now."

"We have to go back," Hopper said looking at her. "Until I can figure out what's going on with the lab you have to go back into hiding kid. I don't know what else to tell you." They looked at one another with sadness in both of their eyes.

"Please," Mike said beside her. "This is torture, you can't do this. You can't just leave her alone all the time, it's not fair."

"Then what's your plan," Hopper said. "Hide her in your basement and hope your parents don't find out? There is no other place for her to go."

"You can't just leave her there Hop," Joyce said.

"I don't just leave her there, it's not like I let her live on her own. I live with her too."

"She needs more interaction than a cranky man coming home late from work every day." Joyce said back.

"You have to let us see her," Mike continued. "She has to have her friends, or she'll go stir crazy."

"Okay!" Hopper said loudly. "Just, let us get our feet back under us. Let us clean up the cabin, get some new windows in, and then figure out if having guest over is something that we can get away with." Hopper sighed looking back at El. "Remember, I don't want to be a black whole anymore. I'm just trying to do my best at protecting you." El looked back down at her hands, trying not to let herself cry in front of everyone. She nodded her head in understand, while Mike took her hand in his.

"It's going to be okay," he said quietly. "Something will work out, I know it will."

2. Chapter 2

Hawkins 1983

He couldn't breathe; blood was oozing out of his side causing a warm puddle to form all around him. In the far distance of the school he could hear the kids screaming; the monster screeching at the top of its lungs. He had been so close to getting her back, to creating the ultimate weapon, but it wasn't enough.

"Down here," he heard someone yell over the chaos. Brenner opened his eyes, lights from the ceiling flickered on and off. He could hear the hard footsteps of men running down the hall way. He looked at either side of him to see all the dead and half eaten bodies.

The screeching became more intense, the lights grew brighter; hurting his eyes and making the room white. The footsteps stopped in their place, everything stopped. Brenner lifted his hands to his ears, the sound making him want to cry out.

"He alive," a man kneeled on his right side, putting pressure to the wound by his liver. He let out a gasp, never understanding what pain really was until this moment. "We need to move before that thing comes back." Brenner looked around him; three men clouded his vision as they started to lift him from the floor.

"El!" he head a boy scream from down the hall. "El where are you?" His screams were becoming faint. "Eleven!" and then all he saw was darkness.

Hawkins 1984

She sat on Wills bed, watching him breathe. She had been so excited to meet him a year ago. The boys had made him out to be the best friend anyone would want, but once she watched all the bad men crowd Mike's house just a year ago, she knew meeting him was never going to happen.

His eyes were still rimmed with darkness, and his hair was slightly greasy. He had woken a few hours ago, screaming and crying for

Joyce. It reminded her of all the times she would wake up in her old room from dreams. How she knew that even though she woke up from the nightmare, it didn't mean it was over.

She thought about the dream she had. Her cheek still felt a sting when she pressed her fingers to it. The memory of her Papa made her shiver. She didn't know what to think, and she didn't know if she should tell anyone. *Friends don't lie*, but was this a lie or a secret; a word she had learned from the T.V.

"I'm sure he'll wake up soon," Joyce stood in the door way, watching El as she daydreamed. The sudden noise made her jump looking up at her in surprise. "I didn't mean to sneak up on you," she said slowly walking into the room. "Mike should be leaving soon. I thought I would let you know." El bent her head in appreciation, giving one last look at Will before standing up.

"Will you tell me when he wakes up?" El stood eye level to Joyce, making her realize that within the past year she had been growing. She looked down at the space pajamas she was wearing, and then back at will. "Thank you for the bath last night," she said before leaving the room.

"I don't know what I'm going to tell my mom," she heard Max's voice from the hall. "She is going to kill me, I won't be seeing daylight until I'm eighty." El crept around the corner, looking into the front room not wanting to disturb them.

"Maybe you should tell them about Billy," Lucas said. "They can't be too mad at you for running from him."

"No," she said back. "I think him and I have an understanding now."

"Well, I get to go home to my mom." Dustin said. "She sure as hell didn't find Mews so now I need to console her while she morns." El wondered what a mews was, and why it meant so much to Dustin's mother. She stayed where she stood, looking at the group of friends all lazily sitting around the room. Mike half laid on the couch, his eyes closed and arms crossed over his chest.

"El," she jumped slightly, Dustin stood from his spot on the floor. He

walked over, giving her a hug. "I think it's totally badass that you risked your life, again. What was it like? What did it look like? Did Hopper go all badass superhero on the demi-dogs?" El slowly crept into the room, suddenly feeling slightly uncomfortable.

"Umm," she said quietly.

"You don't have to answer those questions," Max said. "I'm sure it was different to you than how these guys picture it." El slightly smiled at her, feeling a little embarrassed for the way she had treated her before.

"You're like a Jedi knight," Dustin began to talk again. "I never thought one of my best friends would be a Jedi. No one would believe me if I told them."

"Shut up Dustin," Lucas said. "She obviously doesn't want to talk about it." Dustin took a seat next Lucas on the floor, their backs leaning on the couch, Mike's leg sat in-between them. Dustin threw a punch at Lucas's arm, Lucas sent one back.

"Can you not," Mike said quietly. He kept his eye closed; arms over his chest. "Some of us are trying to sleep." El took a seat in front of them, Max scooting from her place on the wall to sit next to her.

"What was it like traveling to Chicago?" Max asked her. She looked sideways at the girl, and then down at her hands.

"I don't know," she said. "I wasn't scared, but I also felt," what did she feel? "Like I was missing something."

"Maybe you were just homesick," Max said back. El lifted her head to look at her.

"Homesick?"

"Yeah, like a feeling you get, you know?" Max search around the room for words. "When you just really miss your home, that's what can make you sick."

"Yeah," El said nodding her head. "I have been homesick."

"Me too," Max said back. "I moved far from home recently. I've been very homesick." El looked back down at her hands, slightly feeling guilty for the way she had been treating her. "But, I've made some friends, and got to fight some other dimensional beings, so I guess I'm not as homesick as I was before." Max smiled at her, she gave a smile back.

"Okay guys," Hopper stomped into the room. "It's time for everyone to get on their bikes, or however you got here in the first place and head home." Mike stretched and opened his eyes.

"Can I have like ten more minutes?" He asked.

"Nope," Hopper said. "Everyone up." They all stood from their spot, Mike sitting up and putting his head down in his hands. "You and me," he pointed to El. "We are heading back; we have a lot of work to get done if we want to sleep tonight." El gave a slight groan, then moment she had been dreading was coming.

"Can't we wait until Will wakes up?" She asked.

"Maybe we can see him another time," Hop said. "I don't know when, but once I find out what's going on maybe we can work something out."

"What about me," Mike said standing from the couch.

"What about you," Hopper said back.

"When can I come and see her? Will you let me know if anything is happening? Will there be a time that we can all get together at the cabin?"

"Whoa kid," Hop said putting his hands up in defense. El looked over to Mike, his eyes matched her sad ones, and he looked back.

"We'll wait outside," Max said grabbing the boys by their shirts and dragging them out. She closed the front door with a slam, their shoes scrapping on front porch as they walked down the steps.

"I don't know," Hop said slowly. "I don't know anything until I am able to figure out who knows that El is not only alive, but here." A

silence fell between all three of them. El thought about the days that were going to follow, how she would take her usual seat on the couch, holding her teddy and watching all the dramas she could find on T.V. She thought about her dictionary, how she was going to learn more words, even though she was going to go days without talking. She thought about Mike, and how he would call her every night for a year, and if he would do the same now that he knew she was listening. "I'll give you a minute," Hop said looking between them before walking into the kitchen.

Mike walked up to her, standing close as he grabbed her shoulders.

"I still can't believe you're here," he said with a slight smile. "I can still tell you about my day, if you'll be listening. Maybe this time you can let me know that you're there." El threw her arms around him in a hug letting her eyes fill with tears.

"You promise," she said.

"I promise," he said back. He pulled her back to look her in the eyes. "Maybe you can go to the snowball this year. We can dance, and have punch."

"Punch?"

"It's a drink," Mike said with a wet smile. "and we can all hang out and be normal for once."

"Normal." Mike pulled her into another hug before breaking her away from him. They stared into one another eyes; Mike was trying to hold back tears. El leaned forward slowly moving towards his lips.

"Okay," Hop said walking back into the room. " Minutes over." Mike gave a frustrating sigh letting his hands fall into hers.

"Every night, I'll be there, I promise." He looked up at Hop before removing his hands from hers and walking out of the door. She let out a little growl of frustrations as she cried, watching them leave down the drive way from the window.

"Okay," Hop said as they walked over the trip wire. The air had felt colder today than it had the days before, she didn't know if that was

because she felt slightly empty again or if it was really the weather changing. The door of the cabin sat wide open, the wooden boards over the windows were still there, and it didn't look like home anymore; just an old wooden hut that was abandoned. "I think the first thing I'll have to do is fix this door." They walked up the steps of the front porch; El let her feet fall heavier than they needed to.

Glancing from the door way she could see the mess that was made from before. Heaters sitting in a circle, Hops bed a mess, their sitting room didn't look like it used to. She peered into the kitchen, noticing the old Eggo box that had been thrown in the trash can, but other than that nothing had changed there.

Her bedroom door was slightly ajar. She slowly walked through the cabin to get to it. She opened the door slowly to see her bed the way that she had left it; the teddy bear Hopper had given her resting on top of the blanket. She walked over and picked it up, thinking about what Hopper had told her in the car on the way to the Lab.

"Sara," he had said in a sad voice. "Sara's my baby girl."

She let the teddy fall onto the bed, realizing that he had given her his daughters toy with trust, and she had been rude enough not to care as much as she should have. She sat on her bed next to it, looking around her room. Her book case had a few books that she had started, but never finished. She had a snow globe on a shelf that hung from the wall. It held a large castle on the inside of the glass, and every time she tipped it upside down it would snow.

"What do you say kiddo," Hop interrupted her thoughts, walking into her door way. He still wore the cloths he had on the night before. His chief jackets covered a green hospital shirt underneath. "I was thinking you could clean the sheets; maybe move some furniture around while I went to the supply store to get stuff to fix the door."

"I can do that," she said quietly. Hop moved to leave half way turning his back. "Jim?" he stopped and turned to her. She picked up the teddy bear, looking at it in her lap. "What did she name it?" She asked looking back up at him.

"The teddy bear?" he came into the room, sitting next to her on the

bed; picking up the teddy bear to look at it. "She had this obsession with names that started with S's. She named almost all her dolls Suzy and Sally because she thought those were the best names, but when I gave her this teddy bear she told me it was a boy. She named him Aaron, but would call him Air." He slightly looked off into the distance; El could see a memory form in his eyes and wondered what she must have been like. "She always had trouble breathing." Hop looked down at the bear one last time, handing him back to El and standing from the bed. "I should only be forty or so minutes, it shouldn't take too long." And at those words he was out of her room, and down the front steps. She listened to his feet hit the dead leads until she couldn't hear him anymore.

...

Mike sat in his basement, sitting on the couch with his walkie in his hand. He knew it was too early to try and talk to El, but he honestly couldn't wait any longer. He had only gotten home an hour ago. His mom made a slight comment about not having kids anymore since they are never home, but Mike ignored her as he went up the steps to the bathroom; he really needed a shower.

He had spent more time in the shower than he needed. He watched as the dirt fell from his skin and down the drain. He couldn't believe what he had just gone through. It was like an actually game of D&D, and they had won; even though it didn't feel like winning.

It wasn't until he was in his room to change, when he looked at his bunkbed, his desk, and all the pictures that hung on his wall that he realized he felt heartbroken. So, he went down stairs, into the basement, and there he sat with his walkie on the wrong channel. Thinking about when he could talk to her, and what he should say.

"Hey!" Mike jump nearly out of his skin as Nancy came down the stairs.

"Jesus Nancy," Mike said angrily. "Are you trying to scare me to death?"

"Sorry," she said. "I just thought I would let you know that Will woke up. He said he was feeling tired and a little out of it, but nothing out

of the ordinary." Mike gave a slight huff, *nothing out of the ordinary my ass*, he thought. "Mom wants us to have an early dinner. She setting the table right now," she slowly turned back around, moving up the steps but stopping in the middle. "If you ever want to talk," she turned her head to look at Mike. "You can talk to me. I don't really know much about her, but I would like to." Mike gave a sad smirk looking back down at his walkie, and turning it off.

"Thanks," he said. He stood from his spot of the couch, putting the walkie on the coffee table before following Nancy up the stairs.

His mother made one of his favorite meals, ham, mashed potatoes, and corn. He looked down at his plate, not really wanting to eat. He place the tip of his fork in and out of his potato's, looking at Holly who tried her best at spooning corn into her mouth. Several kernels fell into her lap as she tried to use one hand to guide the spoon and the other to keep the cornels in place.

"So," his mom said. She adjusted her napkin in her lap. "What's going on with Will?" She looked up at Mike, her eyes filled with concern and curiosity.

"He was just having a slight nervous break I guess," Mike said, slouching down into his seat. "He was having flash backs to last year, but now he's feeling a little bit better."

"Yes well, who wouldn't." she said picking up her fork. "Maybe I'll bring Joyce some casserole tomorrow. That poor woman's been through enough."

"The boy should be put on meds," his father chirped in. "They have pills for anything these days."

"Ted!"

"What? The poor boy can't even sort through his own thoughts. He needs something to help him out." Ted looked back down at her dinner. Mike stole a glance at Nancy who gave him one right back.

"How was your girls weekend Nancy? Did you have fun?" His mother moved on in the conversation. Nancy made up a story about how

they spent their time watching movies and talking gossip. Mike looked back to his food, thinking about the lab, about Bob, and most of all about almost being killed nearly every step of the way.

Dinner lasted nearly thirty minutes, Mike helped Nancy with some dishes before speeding back down into the basement. He grabbed his walkie, going into the makeshift tent that lay against the wall. He hid under the sheets, bringing up the antenna and turning it on with the twist of the knob. He let out a slow breath, not knowing if he should start talking or just wait a little bit longer. He slumped his back against the wall.

"El," he said into the speaker. "I don't know if you're listening yet." He sat for a moment in silence, trying to see if the lights would flicker, or if anything would be said back. "I can't stop thinking about... everything. I'm almost certain I saw something in shadows of my room earlier, but I think I'm still a little jumpy." He brought the walkie away from his mouth, waiting before talking again. "Are you scared? I guess I am, but if I wasn't then I guess something would be wrong with me." He sat a little longer in silence, letting his mind wonder to the far reaches of his thoughts.

"I guess I just wanted to say goodnight. I hope you get some rest, and I hope you're feeling better." He listened to the static a little bit longer. "Goodnight El." He hit the antenna down with the palm of his hands, moving out of the fort, he stood from his place looking back down at the fort, before turning around and walking back up the stairs.

...

El sat on her bed putting on two pairs of socks on one foot. Since the windows were still broken they had to go with the cold breeze moving through the cabin, and the later into the night it got, the colder her toes felt. She looked through her bedroom door at Hopper, he slumped over the small fire place a new log through the opening. She gathered her blanket from her bed; throwing it over her shoulder and picking up the bear as she started to walk out of her bed room.

She had spent a good portion of the afternoon moving around furniture, and sweeping the wooden floors. She took all the files she

had thrown around the sitting area and placed them carefully back into the box, hiding it in the crawl space under the floor. She moved everything by hand, which at first didn't sound as bad, but once she started moving the couch she started to realize how weak she really was.

She didn't want to tell Hopper, but her head had been hurting all day. She could feel her limbs not wanting to put work in, and every time she walked her leg muscles let out a twinge of pain that she didn't want to feel.

She took a seat on the couch, hugging her knees to her chest. Hop took a set on his bed just next to her, taking off his shoes, placing them to the side. He put his hands over his face, rubbing his eyes before looking up at El.

"You look like shit," he said tiredly. She raised her eye brows, eyeing him. "I'm sure I do too. You sleep on the couch tonight; the cold shouldn't be too bad next to the fire." She nodded her head, adjusting herself to lay her head on the armrest. She could hear Hop move around on the bed, he sighed as he got comfortable and she did the same. "I have a full day tomorrow," he said to her through the darkness. "I'll have to wake up early and maybe come home later than I would want to, but hopefully by the end of the day I'll have some glass for the windows." El nodded her head again, realizing that he couldn't see her, but was becoming too tired to use her voice. She gave her bear a slight squeeze letting her eye lids fall.

She wanted to see Mike, but she had never been able to see him while she slept. She walked through the blackness, her sock covered feet becoming wet, but she couldn't feel it. She started walking straight, not hearing or seeing anything around her. The drips of her feet echoed through her ears.

"El," she heard Mike's voice. "I don't know if you're listening yet." She turned in circles, looking for anything in the darkness that she could walk to. A shape was forming far to her left, she quickly moved towards it.

"Mike!" she said, her voice echoing loud.

"Please," El stopped in her steps. A female's voice rang through the nothingness. "I'm so tired." She could hear faint whimpers as she slowly

started to move towards the figure again. A girl, hunched over in her bed, her knees to her chest. It was the same girl from the night before, her head was shaved, and her arms were rimmed red from rope burn.

"You have to come," a woman she didn't recognize came from her right, taking the girls arms and began to try and force her out of bed. "Do you want me to get the other men?" The woman asked her in a harsh voice.

"No," the girl quietly whispered. "I just want to sleep."

"You've been sleeping all day. This isn't up for debate; we have more tests to run." The girl let out a small cry as the woman pulled her from the bed. "Help," the older woman screamed. She could hear men in the distance talking, but couldn't see anyone else with them. All around her walls began to form, the black obis that she normally stood in starting to form into an actual room. They walls were yell, and cold. Nothing sat in the small square room except for a bed.

"Please don't let them do this," the girl cried. She struggled in the woman's arms, but her small frame wasn't enough to get free. El hurried forward, ready to aid her if she could. The girl struggled hiss at the burns being pulled at from her arms. El felt the pain sting, she looked down to find red burns form on her. "Please," the girl sobbed, she stopped her movement as El bent in front of her. They looked into one another's eyes. "Please," El put her hand out to her, near her face. Before she could touch her everything turned to cloud, evaporating in front of her eyes.

She sat on her knees, looking around her, tears falling onto her cheek. What was happening? How was this happening? Who was this girl? Why could she feel her pain?

"El," Mike's voice echoed all around her. She looked up from her daze, standing from her knees. A shape appeared in front of her, Mike. She slowly walked forward; she could feel her toes becoming cold. "I don't know if you're listening yet," he said into his walkie. She took a set in front of their fort, watching as he stared ahead, straight through her. "I can't stop thinking about," his pause made her look around slightly, nervous that someone was watching. "Everything. I'm almost certain I saw something in the shadows of my room earlier, but I think I'm just jumpy."

"Jumpy," El said to herself. She knew the word jump, but the way he was

using it confused her. "Jumpy?" She asked him, forgetting they weren't in the same room.

"Are you scared?" he asked slightly quiet. She thought about the question.

"Yes," she said looking down at her hands. Her arms showed traces of red, where rope could have been.

"I guess I am," he continued on. "But if I wasn't I guess something would be wrong with me." They both sat in silence for a few seconds. El thought about being scared, about what she was scared of. Words she didn't know, the dark, being alone. "I guess I just wanted to say goodnight. I hope you get some rest, and I hope you're feeling better." El let out a slight cry. "Goodnight El." He slammed the metal down with his hand and stood from his spot.

El moved out of his way, scared that her touch would make him disappear.

"Mike," she cried, slowly following him. His color was fading, his features less visible. "I'm listening." She put out her hand to catch his, but as soon as he evaporated she opened her eyes.

The fire had dimmed slightly, and even though she was wearing two socks on each foot her toes were still cold. She had fallen asleep with her head closes to Hop, but ended up waking up on the other side of the couch. The blanket she had been using was on the floor, and the bear she had been clutching was nowhere in sight. Even though she was shivering, she didn't pick it up her blanket.

Hop let out a soft snore, giving El a little comfort that she wasn't alone. She looked over at the T.V. becoming sad that it was broken and it would still be a couple of days before Hopper could fix it. She sat up from her seat, looking into the kitchen and all along the walls. For some reason something felt different. The feeling of safety that she had when she lived here before didn't remain, and all she could feel was a dark shadow looming over her.

"Can't sleep kid," Hops soft tired voice startled El. She looked over at Hop with a slightly pissed expression; he gave a small laugh before sitting up. He grabbed his watch, which he tucked into his shoe

before going to bed, and read the time. "4 in the morning," he yawned. "I guess I'll get up a little earlier than expected." He stood from the bed, walking over to the bathroom and started the shower. "Go back to sleep kid," he said leaning in the door way. "You need to rest."

"Yeah," she said back. She took the blanket from the floor, rapping herself up and looked around for the teddy bear; she couldn't find it anywhere. She sighed. Giving up her search and laid her head back down to fall asleep.

Hopper looked over at El sleeping on the couch. He let out a sigh, because whether he liked it or not she had become someone in his life that he thought he would never get back. He didn't want to leave her for the day; she still had dark circles under her eyes and the lack of food she had consumed since the last time he had seen her was concerning, but if he wanted to get to the bottom of how he was going to fix this he needed to start sooner rather than later. So, he took a few quiet steps to the front door, put his hat on his head, and locked what locks he could before walking out into the cold.

He took two steps from the porch before realizing something was off, and turned around to see what it was. Sitting off to the side of the last step sat Aaron the teddy bear. He walked up to it and picked it up, dew was starting to form on the fur and it was cold, like it had been sitting out in the open for hours. He looked back to the front door, wondering what she had been doing outside in the middle of the night. He took a few glances around the surrounding forest trying to find anything suspicious.

He walked back up the steps and unlocked the door, slowly walking into the dark cabin. El still lay where he had left her, her face barely visible from the blanket. He took a few steps into her room, placing the bear on her bed, looking down at it sadly.

"He's a boy," he heard his daughter giggle. "I'm going to name him Aaron."

"Are you okay," Hopper jumped in his spot, spinning around fast to see El standing with her blanket wrapped around her.

"Yeah kid," He said clearing his throat. He ruffled her hair as he

pasted her. "Make sure your eating breakfast and lunch." He yelled before walking out the door.

3. Chapter 3

Willowbrook, Statin Island 1984

She didn't know what waffles were, but she craved one more than anything else. She had heard the word in a dream just a few nights before, and she had smelled a sweet smell of something delicious before she was woken up. So, when a woman walked in with a tray of gray food, the same gray food she ate every day, she knew that she had to leave and find the smell that was haunting her in her sleep.

"Eat," the woman said, throwing the tray onto her bed before walking back out of the metal door; the sound of the slamming door bounced off her yellow walls. She picked up the fork, looking at the plastic prongs trying to figure out what she could do with it. How she could use it to benefit her.

Her head had been hurting for days, and ever since she had seen the frail girl in her visions; her body had become weaker. She thought back to the dream she had last night; a girl standing on cold steps. She had balanced a stuffed toy on the side of the step, watching her as she moved through the trees to get closer. She had seen the girl before, she was the one the gray haired man was looking for, and even though she would want to see the outside, she knew she couldn't give up the girl's location.

It had been far too long since she felt fresh air on her face, and she could still see the sky in her vision when she closed her eyes hard enough, but she knew that there was no one out there looking for her. She was alone now, and that's why she didn't fight; but now she was ready. She wanted to leave, she wanted to find this girl, and she wanted to take these people down with everything that she had.

She thought back to her mother, how they would skip town from train to train. She thought about not being old enough to understand, and even though she didn't quite know how old she was, she still felt like that little girl that got taken so many years ago. She thought the girl could help her figure things out, like what her name was, or why they wanted to keep them closed in so bad. All she wanted was some sleep, and some answers to why this happened to her, and when it

was going to end.

She looked down at the bandages placed on both of her arms, the small rope burns scabbing over and causing an itch. She took the fork and placed it into her bandage on her upper left arm, taking the tray of food and throwing it against the wall.

Hawkins, Indian 1984

El looked at her arms in the bathroom. She decided that for a few hours she would ignore the pain and try to fall back asleep, but when she tried to start a fire in the fireplace she felt her arms burn and sting. At that moment she knew she had to come to reality about the situation. So as she turned on the light in the bathroom, and rolled up her long sleeves she told herself that it wouldn't be that bad.

In all honesty she had felt worst pain in her life, for god sakes she closed a portal to another dimension just a few days before, but for some reason, as she looked down at the lined burns on her arms, she knew this wasn't good.

She quickly walked to the sink in the kitchen, pulling the first aid box from the cabinet under the sink; looking for anything to wrap her arms in. Hopper had told her the day he had placed the metal box in the cabinet that it was only to be used for emergency, this was an emergency, wasn't it?

She came across some bandages, pulling them out and seeing if there was enough for both arms. By the time she unraveled it and wrapped the bandage up to her elbows she noticed that there was nothing left but an empty roll of cardboard. She threw the remnants back into the metal box, closing it up, and placing it the exact way she had found it.

Friends don't lie, she heard her voice in her head, but this wasn't a lie, it was a secret and she was okay with that; she thinks. It wasn't until she sat on the couch, staring at the broken T.V. that her situation really sank in. She was here again, stuck inside with the shade down, door locked, and no communication with the outside world.

She let her sleeves fall back down to her wrist, hiding any evidence of

her arms, and wrapped her blanket around her. The fire cracked loudly, causing her to slightly jump, she stared into the flames, watching them dance. Her eyes were slightly falling, but she didn't want to sleep. Sleep meant missing the day, and missing the day meant staying up when it was dark out. The last thing she wanted to do was sit in the darkness and listen to Hopper snore.

What if I did go outside, she thought to herself. *Who's really out there right now?* She imagined the lab at this moment, if it was crawling with bad people, picking up what they had let loose, what she had let loose. She looked at her hands, trying to find any proof of who she was, but all she could see was lines in her palms; figure prints is what Hopper told her.

She stood from her spot on the couch, looking at her boots by the door, and walked over to put them on. By the time she laced her second shoe she became fully aware of what she was doing, but didn't care. She took her coat from the back of the dinner table chair, swinging it around her while she unlocked the door with her mind.

Her first step out in the cold took her breath away. The temperature had changed dramatically over the past few days, and as she let a warm breath out as she watched a puff of smoke leave her lips. She closed the door behind her, taking a few steps down from the porch. She looked at the leaf covered ground, and then back up at the cabin, finally walking off past the trip wire and down into the trees.

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Mike spent the morning staring out his Biology class window. Dustin's head bobbed up and down in front of him, trying not to fall asleep and Mr. Clark talked about the function of plant cells. Lucas passed a note to Max who slightly laughed, wrote something down, and passed it back. Mike slumped low in his seat, looking at Max in Will's empty desk and sighed.

"Isn't this fascinating?!" Mr. Clark turned from the chalk board, a detailed drawing of two different types of cells on the board. "Who can tell me what the mitochondria does, and why it's so important to a living cell?" No one raised their hand, Dustin's head hit the desked hard, making a loud bang in the silence, and Lucas looked over to

him rolling his eyes.

"What was that!?" Dustin said, raising his head quickly.

"It was your ginormous head hitting solid wood," Max said back.

"Is everything okay Dustin?" Mr. Clark asked. The whole class looked at him, Mike looked around slightly annoyed.

"Yeah," Dustin said quickly. "It was just a long weekend," he gave a slightly awkward laugh. Mr. Clark raised his eyes going back to the chalk board and circling the mitochondria.

"The Mitochondria," Mr. Clark continued. Mike let his mind wonder again as the class settled back into the lecture. He had decided last night that he was going to visit Chief Hopper after school. He knew the rules, but he thought that if he groveled just a little bit he would be able to see her just once.

December was coming faster than he wanted it to, and with December came the Snow Ball. She had missed the last one, and he knew if he just asked she would say yes. It was Hopper that was going to be hard to convince.

"Mike," Lucas looked behind him, grabbing his backpack from the floor. "The bell rang, let's go." They all stood from their desks, leaving the room with a nod towards Mr. Clark. Dustin let out a yawn stretching his arms over his head.

"You would think we would at least get a few days off after saving the world," Dustin said. "I can't even keep my head up in my favorite subject; I don't know what it's going to be like in English. Ms. Mays always turns the lights low and reads lines from the book; it's going to be torture."

"At least it's not Mr. Block." Max said. "He turns the lights off and shares picture of his Gini pigs that he dresses up for reenactments. Last week they were fighting the Civil War."

"I would die to see that," Lucas said. They came to their break in the hall way, each going in a different direction to class. At this time of day Mike and Will had study hall, but today he was going to go it

alone. He knew that the next few weeks were going to be quiet, but he didn't know if he was ready for the silence.

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Hopper looked at the television in the break room. All the officers crowded around him as they watch *breaking news* come across the T.V. screen. They could see the Hawkins Lab from a helicopter camera, military cars going in and out of the gates. The story had broken overnight, a private investigator finding out that Barbra's death was done by exposure to chemicals in the lab. Hopper shook his head, trying to think of how this could help him.

They weren't going to be in Hawkins anymore, at least that's what it looked like. That could mean anything for El, she would be able to possibly go out more, but there still had to be people watching. There was no way that everything would be that easy to walk away from. She had been out for only two days, but she left a big impression before going back into hiding. They must know someone closed the gate, or the passage way from one world to the next. There was no way people weren't watching him at this moment.

Hopper stole a glance around the room, every person he stood by he recognized. At least here he felt slightly safe; he had his team, and even though he didn't fully trust their brain power, he knew they wouldn't have the ability to spy. He decided to walk away from the News, to go back into his office and look at the phone number he got from Dr. Owens. He could have a real possible chance to give a life to El. He could actual say "soon" and mean it this time. So, he picked up his phone, dialing the number on his card.

"This is Dr. Owens." His voice was raspy and tired. It had taken him three rings to get to the phone, and he sounded out of breath.

"Dr. Owens, this is Jim Hopper with Hawkins Policy Force," There was a slight buzz of silence then Hopper went on. "I'm call to see if we could have lunch, maybe around noon tomorrow."

"Oh yes," Owens said. "Why not the café in town? May I ask about the occasion?"

"Well," Hopper began fiddling with his blue bracelet on his wrist, the phone jammed between his ear and his shoulder. He looked at the land phone on his desk, not wanting to say too much in case someone was listening. "I saw the news about what's happening to the lab, and since I would accompany Will Byers to his doctor visits I would like to follow up with you on how to keep Will's health in check." There was another pause. "Of course, I have a few questions that I would love for you to answer, just be there at noon." There was a slight knock on his door. He looked up to see Mike Wheeler awkwardly looking into the room. His arms held the straps to his bag that rested on his back, and Hopper sighed. "Just be there," before slamming down the phone.

"I'm sorry to interrupt," Mike said slowly easing himself into the room. "I just wanted to come by and ask you a question." Mike took a seat in one of the chairs in front of his desk, sitting on the edge and bouncing his leg up and down with nervousness.

"No," Hopper said, standing from his desk. "I told you kid, no one sees her until I figure this out." Mike stood quickly from his chair, anger appearing in his eyes.

"That's not fair," he said loudly. "You can't just lock her up, she'll go crazy." Hopper rolled his eyes, putting his hand out to calm Mike down as he moved around his desk to close his door.

"Zip it kid," he said slightly under his breath. He walked back to his desk, standing behind it and puffed out his chest. "She and I have an understanding right now. She needs rest, and she needs to be careful. The lab is being evacuated, there are men crawling all over this town right now; why the hell would I let her cover be blown because some teenage boy can't keep his emotions in check?"

"That's low," Mike said loudly. "You know she wants to see all of us as much as we want to see her." They both stared at one another for a few seconds. Mike spoke again. "At least let her come to the Snow Ball. I invited her last year, but then everything happened and she was gone. I'm sure she would want to go this time." Mike slightly looked defeated, and Hopper let his chest fall.

"Look," Hopper sat back down in his seat looking down at his desk

then back up at Mike. "Give me a day." Mike sat down listening. "Give me a day to see what's going on in this town, and then I'll give you an answer." He looked over at his clock, the time reading 2:45. "Shouldn't you be in school?"

"Umm," Mike stood quickly. "School let out early," he said walking to the door. "I guess I'll talk to you tomorrow," he rushed out of the door before Hopper could do anything. He stood behind his desk, rubbing his forehead. He needed a cigarette, maybe a donut on top of that, but the only thing he had time for was to drive around town and take in who was watching; who was listening.

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She wanted to find the quarry where Mike had jumped off the cliff. Even though she had spent many days in the tub, a tank big enough to swim in, she had never learned how to swim. She wanted to be like those people on T.V. who lay on their backs in the water, who could hold their breath without plugging their nose, and could swim laps in larger pools.

When she finally found her way, first finding the train tracks, and then veering off into the tree line; she started to remember the days she spent alone. How she saw her first snow fall, and she thought it was beautiful until it stung her nose, and made her fingers shoot in a cold pain. She had spent nights with her toes by a small fire. She would count the seconds until she felt warmth that would make her shivers go away.

She found the quarry, filled with calm water, standing by the edge of the small shore line; debating if she wanted to put her hands in. Mike had told her about his summer swims when she was away. On day 150, when they all went and swam in the quarry; Dustin had stepped on a jagged rock, making their visit shorter than they wanted it to be. They ended up at Dustin's house with his mother fawning over him while they watched Star Wars for the hundredth time. Mike had said it was a good day, even though his voice sang a different tone.

She bent down, lifting up her left sleeve, and put her hand in the water; quickly taking in the cold air as she felt the sting of the icy water. She had wanted to swim so bad, she wanted to know what it

was like to be in the water, and just breathe. To be there for fun, and not for the ability to hear; for her ability to spy. She just wanted to laugh, and swim, and laugh some more.

She heard twigs break in the tree line behind her; she quickly stood straight, taking her hand out of the water and turned around. And there he stood, Hopper with his angry face and all, putting his hands on his hips and looking to the sky in anger.

"Why!?" he said, walking out into the open. El let her sleeve fall quickly, drying her hand on her overalls. He walked up to her, grabbing her arm and dragging her back into the trees. "Why are you out here?"

"Air," she said. Hopper stopped in his tracks, and turned to look her in the eyes. "I just wanted some air." She was having a hard time breathing. She didn't know if it was because she got caught, or if it was because she felt trapped. She could feel her eyes begin to water.

"Let's go," Hopper said through his teeth. He dragged her through the trees, never letting go of the death grip he had on her arm. "This place in crawling with people, and the one day you decided to do something stupid it had to be today." El let a tear fall down her face. She knew her freedom was starting to become farther and farther away; that his so called "grounding" was about to ensue.

It was a ten minute hike back to his truck. They would stop every once and a while; Hopper looking around them to make sure no one was following. Hopper threw her in the passenger seat, slamming the door before rushing over to the driver side and jumping in. They sat in silence as he backed out of the woods slowly; the only sound heard was the emotional snuffle of El's nose as she slightly cried. All she wanted was to swim; all she wanted was to laugh.

"Kid," Hopper said in a calmer voice. They had been driving for at least five minutes on the road back to the cabin. "Trust has to go both ways here. You have to trust me that when I say soon, I mean soon." El let out a huff and crossed her arms over her chest.

"Soon," she repeated back. "I hate that word. Soon is a lie, soon is never." Hopper looked over to her as she hid her face by looking out

her window. She gave another sniffle, trying to hide her cold fingers in the sleeve of her jacket. "I'm tired of everything being soon." She looked over at Hopper trying to control her anger. "Freedom." She said, remembering a commercial for the pride for America, the land of the free. They sat in the car in silence for the rest of the way. Hopper parked the car on the dirt path, and El looked through the trees, seeing the sun getting lower in the sky.

"El," Hopper said. "I promise this time, it won't be as long. It can't be as long, but you have no idea what's out there." El let him watch her in silence as she thought about what he said. She looked away from her window and back at Hop, his hat was off and his eyes looked tired. "You were supposed to be sleeping, and eating. Walking out in the cold all day is the opposite."

"It was quiet," El said. "I wanted to know how to swim." They stared at one another for a few seconds, a confused expression playing on Hoppers face. She opened her door, stepping onto the forest floor. Hopper followed as they both slammed their doors and walked through the trees; Hopper putting his hat back on.

"They are clearing out the lab," Hopper said. El looked over at him, but he stared straight ahead. "They are clearing everything out and leaving. You were closer than you think from being seen today kid." El thought back to her walk today. It had been unusually quiet, but she hadn't seen anyone. She was careful to keep her ears and eyes open.

"I'm sorry," she said slightly. "Why were you there?" They both made a slight right, noticing a small cabin hidden by the trees. A gust of wind hit El, her jacket slowly opened up and she could feel her small frame freeze over.

"I was going around town to see if they were looking around. I didn't see any of their vans, and I didn't see anyone that I didn't recognize. I decided to go into the woods, because I know they are closer to us than I would like. I saw a few men with some weird technological things I didn't understand. They were searching the forest for something. They were checking the dirt, and the trees. I followed them for a little while, until I noticed you walking through the forest out the corner of my eye." They both stepped over the trip wire

together, and El let a shiver run down her back. She had been closer than she thought.

"I'm sorry," she said again. They walked up to their home; Hopper slowly opened the door letting El in first. Hopper took his hat off, placing it on the hook by the door, keeping his jacket on, while a breeze still ran through their cabin.

"Friends don't lie right?" He said to her as he walked into the kitchen. He grabbed a glass from the upper cabinet getting himself a drink of water while El stood by the table, watching him as he gulped down some water. He dried his lips with the back of his hand, leaning against the counter and looking at her. "You look tired kid; want to tell me about it?" She didn't want to tell anyone anything, and even though she knew she was lying to herself about it, she thought keeping it away from him will make it easier for him to figure out how to get her out of confinement.

"I'm just having dreams," she said quietly. "Just some bad dreams, and being back here, alone, is making it slightly harder." Hopper looked down at the floor while El took a seat at the table.

"Mike came to see me today," Hopper said. El looked up, a flurry of emotion rushing through her chest. "He wants to take you to the Snow Ball." She smiled slightly, reading the look on Hoppers face as annoyed, but she didn't care. "I told him I would let him know by tomorrow if you can go. Did you want to go?" El stood from her seat, walking over to Hopper and grabbing his hand.

"Please," she said with hope in her voice. "I promised him, but I was never able to make it." They both looked at one another. "I could wear a dress like the girls on T.V." Hopper sadly looked down and he put his hand to her shoulder.

"I promise," he said. "I will get you to that dance one way or another." El let out a slight squeal, she didn't really know where it came from, but the excitement was boiling over her head. Hopper ruffled her hair, and she slightly bowed away because she didn't want to curls to mess up.

"Bitchin'" she said loudly, Hopper laughed at her phrasing.

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He had set the fire a little bit after getting home. He had meant to get glass for most of the windows, but got distracted on his search that it never happened. He could hear El moving around her room, changing into warmer close and choosing a book from her small selection that she could read to him.

He was mad, no he was fuming, but he couldn't really blame the girl. The past week had been filled with stress and angst on her part. He wasn't really surprised to see her out in the woods when he did, but the fact that she was so close to being seen made him rage inside his head. He knew anger wouldn't get him anywhere with her. She would just use it right back and bring the entire cabin down with her.

So, as he lit the fire and grabbed two hot teas from the counter, he thought about his meeting with Dr. Owens tomorrow. He thought about his questions: *When can she go out in public? Can you get her legal papers? Is there any way she can be normal at all?* He knew that asking these questions in public was risky, but he needed to know what the next step was. Dr. Owens was his way of finding an end to this never ending "soon" life.

"Dr. Seuss," El appeared in front of him, holding out *The Cat In The Hat*. For the past few weeks he had been making her read anything; wanting her to pick up not only on reading, but on talking as well.

"Good choice," he said. She sat down next to him on the couch, he handed her her hot tea. She took a small sip before placing the mug on the floor and opening the book.

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Mike sat in the small fort in his basement, his legs hanging out of the front as he leaned his back against the door. He held his walkie, listening to the static, and looked down at his calculator watch that read 7:15. He didn't know when to talk. He didn't know when she was listening in the past; it was easier to start his one way conversation. Now she was listening, at least he hoped she was. He didn't know how it worked, if she had to be there while he was talking, or if it was like a recording.

"El?" He let the sound of static play for a few seconds before trying again. "El? It's Mike. I just wanted to say hi, and let you know how my day was." He let the static play, waiting to hear anything that may show that she was listening. "Dustin slammed his head on his desk in Biology today. I guess it was kind of funny, but really I know he is having the same problem we're all having."

Mike looked around his basement, a slight feeling of electricity running up his arms and causing goose bumps. The lamp next to the fort flickered slightly; he sat up straighter. He took his back off the wall, scooting forward to look at the light.

"El? Was that you?" There was no answer through the static, only the feeling of energy up his arm. "I miss you," he said sadly.

"Mike!" his mother called from the top of the stairs. His arms felt the energy fade, the hairs on his arms going down as the goose bumps disappeared. Mike let out a growl of frustration.

"Mom!" he yelled with anger.

"The dishes Mike!" his mother yelled back. Mike looked around the room one more time. The feeling of something being there was gone, and he knew the conversation was over. He turned his walkie off, heading for the stairs before turning to look at the lamp one more time. It sat on its side table, nothing flickering, nothing moving.

4. Chapter 4

She walked slowly, noticing Mike in the distance. She slightly smiled at his feet, as they stuck out of the fort. She had found that when sleep came she didn't really sleep at all. She wanted to see him; she wanted to hear how his day was, and what school was like. So here she was in this void she had created.

"El," Mike's voice sounded distant even though she was getting closer. She stood in front of the fort; his feet and long legs were the only things she could see. "El? It's Mike. I just wanted to say hi, and let you know how my day was." She bent down, looking into the fort acting like he could see her. She sat on some of the blanket looking at him even though he saw right through her. "Dustin slammed his head on his desk in Biology today." El let out a soft snort, picturing his head smacking into the wood. "I guess it was kind of funny, but really I know he is having the same problems we're all having." El's smile disappeared, turning into a frown.

She watched as he sat in a moment of silence, looking around at what she was picturing as the basemen; to her it was just darkness. She noticed his eyes widen, his back straighten.

"El? Was that you?" El looked around her, she wasn't doing anything. She looked back at Mike in confusion; the hairs on his arm were sticking up.

"That wasn't me," she said, but he didn't take notice to her voice. She reached for him slowly, not wanting him to disappear.

"I miss you," she could see his eyes begin to water.

"No," she cried, feeling warm tears fall down her face. She reached up to his face, feeling a static that she wasn't used to feeling. His color was turning gray, he was dissipating.

"Who is he?" a voice rang loudly behind her causing her to drop her hand and jump in fear. El turned her head to the sound of the voice, the girl she had been seeing standing just a few feet away. She stood in a hospital gown, her feet cover with water from the floor.

El stood from her place as the fort began to disappear; she stared at the

girl with confusion. They both took one step towards one another, looking each other in the eyes. Even though the girl was older than her, they still stood at the same height. The hair on the girls head sat the same way hers used to.

"Who are you?" El asked. She slowly reached out for the girl, not knowing if she could touch her or not. She reached for her left arm; the skin was almost like plastic, and cold. They both looked up at one another with wide eyes. El turned the girls arm over, reading the numbers 001 tattooed into her skin. "Who are you?" she asked again. She looked at the girls face, skinny and tired.

"They want me to find you," The girl said. "But I don't want you to be found." There was a moment of silence as El took in those words. Who wanted to find her? Papa? "I just want to sleep," The girl continued. "But there is this darkness that won't leave me alone." Her face turned from serious to scared. Her eyes searched the area behind El as she began to slowly cry. "I don't know what it is, but I can hear it in my sleep. Like the sound of an animal." El heart began to race. She thought about all the things this girl could be seeing, and she began to panic. "He always tells me to go towards the noise," she said in a whimper.

"Who?" El asked, she grabbed the girls hand a little harder, getting closer to her face. "Who is telling you?"

"It likes to follow you," she said in a slight whisper. "I think that's why he wants me to follow it. He knows that it watches over you." A chill ran down El's back. A slight sound of moving water came from behind her; a growl grew into her ears. The girls face screwed tight as she cried silently in fear; backing away from her. El let the girls arm go, listening to foot steps behind her. She closed her eyes, trying to get herself to wake up, to get out. "You have to help me," the girl said still backing up. El looked up at her, not understanding what was going on. A snarl sounded, El spun around to the noise. Behind her stood a Demogorgon, looming over her its mouth slightly opening and bending down to her. El's breath got caught in her chest, she took one step back, slipping on the water and falling on her butt. She could feel the cold press into her body, her overall getting wet, and her feet getting colder.

The other dimensional animal bowed its body over hers; she could feel the warmth of its breath on her skin. So, she screamed as loud as she could,

hoping to be freed from the dream.

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It took two screams for Hopper to open his eyes. They were faint, and at first he thought they could be some kind of animal, but as he slowly opened his eyes the second scream got his attention. He sat up fast, looking around the dark room. The fire had turned to soft embers, and he could feel a big breeze on his face. He looked over to his left; the front door was hanging wide open, and to his right El was missing from her place on the couch.

By the third scream he was on his feet, going for his gun by the kitchen table and running out the front door. The scream sounded like it was coming from each direction; he didn't know which way to go. Another scream came from the back of the cabin; he went around the building, running through the trees. The cold air was making his chest hurt, and a slight frost fell from the sky, melting on his skin.

It took him till the forth scream to find her, lying on the forest floor; facing the sky. He slid onto the floor in front of her, looking around her to see if anyone was there. Her face looked slightly calm, but as he tried to shake her awake he could see her face twist as she let another scream out. Blood was beginning to fall from her nose and onto the side of her face.

"El," he said patting her check and shaking her. "El! Wake up!" he yelled in her face. Her body felt frozen, and her lips were a slight shade of blue. "El!" he yelled one more time. Her eyes flew open, her arms going to grab him as she let in a sharp breath. He grabbed her face, her skin pale by the cold. He let out a sigh of relief as he watched her take in fast breaths. "What are you doing out here?" He asked her. She looked around her; she sat in a slight state of confusion.

"I-I don't know," she tried standing up; she began to shiver. She took the sleeve of her shirt to her nose, trying to rub the blood away.

"We need to get you into the warmth," Hopper said. He picked his gun up from the floor, looking around him one more time. "Come on kid," he said putting his hand on her shoulders and leading her back

home. She stumbled in front of him, she body beginning to shiver harder and harder.

Mike lay in his bed, looking at his ceiling as the sun slowly rose outside of his window. He could hear his mother wake up to an alarm clock in the other room; she walked to Holly's room to start their day. He knew he should probably get up, but all he could do was lay there and stare. He didn't really want to move, he just wanted a day to rest, even though sleep was hard to come by.

He thought about talking to El, how the lights flickered, there was electricity in the air. Today he was going to see Hop, and hopefully he said yes to the Snow Ball. Even if he didn't, Mike was going to figure it out. They had promised a year ago that they would go together, and this year they would.

"Mike," His mom slowly peaked through the closed door. "It's time to wake up honey," she said in the softest voice that she could. Mike rolled his eyes, moving the blanket away from him. She left the door cracked as he sat in bed; placing his feet into the carpet. The shower started down the hall, and he could hear Holly give a small whine as his mother tried to coax her into a shower.

He moved to his closet, trying to see what clothes he wanted to wear in the dim light. His door creaked slowly, and he turned in surprise. Nancy stood in her pj's, she looked slightly spooked glancing at Mike.

"I felt like something was off," she said quietly, looking out his door to see if anyone was listening. "I called Johnathan." Mike felt his stomach drop, he walked closer to Nancy. "He said Hopper came to the house early this morning with El. She was out in the cold last night and got hypothermia." Mike quickly turned back to his closet, grabbing a random sweater and jeans, throwing them on as Nancy continued. "He says that she seems fine, just a little spooked."

"Can you tell mom I went to see Will before school," He grabbed socks from his drawer. He sat on his bed to put them on and looked up at Nancy. She looked at him with a sad expression on her face.

"Yeah," she said in a whisper. "Make sure you're not missing school, if mom finds out your toast." Mike nodded his head, standing and

moving past her; opening the door wider. He stopped and looked at his sister. They hadn't spent not much time together since she got older. They had been close before, but everything changed when she got into more girly things.

"Thanks for letting me know," he said. He went in and gave her a hug, he didn't really know why he did it, but he felt a little comfort crawl through him when he did.

"Sure," she said breathlessly. Mike let go of the hug, running down the hall and to the stairs. He went for his shoes by the door, grabbing his back pack that still lay open at the kitchen table. He threw all his homework into his back pack in a jumbled mess, zipping it up, grabbing his jacket from the couch, and ran for the front door.

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She just wanted to stop shivering. When she woke up in the forest she had so much adrenalin running through her that she didn't even feel cold. It wasn't until she collapsed through the front door of the cabin that she only felt like sleeping, but was having a hard time controlling the shaking she felt from her body. Hopper panicked, not knowing what to do, and had gone straight for the fire place, but there was only one piece of wood left.

He had thrown multiple large coats on top of her, before picking her up and bringing her to his truck. He blasted the heater all the way to the Byers house, where Joyce, through sleepy eyes, started a warm bath and made hot tea. Will helped gather blankets, while Johnathan helped Hop set up a warm spot in the living room.

Hop brought her into the bathroom. Taking off her sweater, and looked down at her arms, covered in bandages. Through her chattering teeth and shaking body she had no strength to move into the bath, so Hop picked her up as she lay in only her undergarments and arm bandages. He placed her into the warm water, and undid the bandages on her arms.

"What is this," he asked, but she had no time to answer. All she could think of was keeping her mind on the breathing and the shaking. She let Hop take every last bit of bandage off. He looked at her scabbed

over cuts, and looked up at Joyce who stood over her shoulder.

"They look like ropes," she said as he moved his hand over the small scabbed burns. They sat in silence for a moment while the phone started to ring. Johnathan stood in the door way of the bath room with towels, passing them to his mother to go answer the phone.

"Okay kid," Hop said. She could feel her body slightly calming down, but even though she was still in hot water she felt so cold. "We are going to get you out, and Joyce is going to help you get into something warm." El tried to nod her head in understand while Hop helped her stand in the tub. The water dripped off of her body and she could feel the cold air touch her wet skin, causing her to start shivering more. Joyce passed a towel to Hop. They both took towels and began to dry her off while she held the wall for support.

"That was Nancy," Johnathan said, coming back into view. "She said she felt like something was off."

"Shit," Hopper said under his breath. "Now we're going to have a worried teenage boy on our hands." He helped El out of the tub, handing the towel to Joyce. "I'll be right in the hall way if you need help," he told her, making Johnathan move out of the way.

"Is she okay," she could hear Wills voice from the hall way. Hopper closed the door while Joyce unfolded some heavy pajama pants.

It wasn't until Hopper had settled her into the couch, three blankets on top of her and a heater plugged in beside her that she really understood what was going on. Hop bent down in from of her face, she was still shaking but not as much.

"I don't know what happened," she said through chattered teeth.

"Mikes here," Will said. He stood slightly behind Hopper looking out the window. El could hear heavy footsteps on the front porch as the front door opened. Light from the rising sun made El's eyes sting. Hopper put his hand up to Mike as he entered the house to shut him up before he even started talking.

"What's the last thing you remember," Hopper asked her. A draft

came through the front door and Mike closed it quickly.

"I remember watching the fire before I closed my eyes." She said, thinking back to last night. "and then I went to listen to Mike," she paused for a moment, not knowing if she should go any farther.

"What else happened?" Hopper glared into her eyes. "Friends don't lie remember."

"It's a secret," she said back. Mike walked around Hopper bending down next to him to look at her. He looked just a worried as the other night when she closed the gate.

"Friends tell each other secrets all the time," Mike said to her. She thought for a minute about what that meant, if she really wanted them to know what she saw.

"There's a girl," she said slowly. She let in a warm breath; she could feel her shivers picking up slightly. "And then there was a monster," both Hopper and Mike looked at one another.

"Do you remember how you got outside," Hopper asked; El tried shaking her head through the mass on blanket. "Do you know where those cuts on your arms came from?" Mike looked back at El in confusion.

"Tied to a chair," she tried to explain, the cold was taking over again. Her teeth chattered loudly and Mike stood to sit next to her on the couch; rubbing her arms over the blankets to keep her warm.

"What chair?" Hopper asked with a little more aggression. "Who tied you to a chair?" El shook her head, she was too tired to explain; she didn't really know how to explain at all.

Hopper stood in the door way of the living room watching Mike whisper to El as she tried to fall asleep. He couldn't get anything out of her while she was so tired, and he knew it would be a while before he really got the full story. Things started making sense. She had looked so tired, and a little timid, but he had thought that was because of how intense the past week had been. She had been sleep walking, but while she was in the other plain; in her void.

"Is it sad that I am kind of used to this kind of stuff now?" Joyce came behind him, handing him a mug of coffee. She smelt slightly of cigarettes and lotion; Hopper took in a deep breath.

"I just wish," Hopper said lowly, looking back to El bundled in the couch. "I wish she could just live." He said, taking a sip of his drink. Will took a seat next to Mike, looking over to El with concerned eyes. He held a blanket over his shoulders, still in his P.J.'s. "How is he?" Hopper looked at Joyce, searching for the answers in her eyes.

"I don't know," she said slowly, looking down into her mug. "He keeps telling me he's fine, but when I catch him when he doesn't know I'm looking," she paused looking up at Will, then at Hopper. "It's like it's still there. Like I can still see it living in his eyes." Hopper looked back over to Will, watching him help Mike calm El down so she could sleep. Mike said something with a smile, and Will let out a laugh. Hopper could see a small smile play on El's lips; her eyes were closed, almost asleep.

"I think we're stupid if we think this is over," Hopper said lightly. He looked over to Joyce, her eyes widened from his statement. "There's no way it's over." He checked his watch, and then down at his cloths. "Can she stay?"

"Of course," Joyce said taking his mug out of his hand and placing both coffees on the dinner table. "You can stay as long as you need."

"Just for a few hours," Hopper said. "I need to head back and get ready, I'm already late. Today's going to be a long day." He turned and walked over to El. Mike and Will looked up at him, Mike looking slightly pissed.

"You go to school," he pointed to Mike, "and you stay here and keep watch," he said to Will.

"I'm not leaving," Mike said. He stood from his spot, him and Hopper meeting chest to chest. "You can't just kick me out."

"Watch me," Hopper said getting closer to his face. He moved Mike out of the way and bent down to El's face. "You need to rest kid," El let out a slight moan. "Like, real sleep. None of this void stuff; don't

go looking for trouble." He ruffled her hair slightly. Standing from his spot he grabbed Mike's arm and dragged him to the door.

"Hey," Mike said loudly.

"Listen Kid," he said opening the door and throwing Mike out of it while taking his own step out. He closed the front door while Mike looked around his shoulder to look inside. "I can't have you skipping school. I have ten thousand things going on and I don't need your parents freaking out to be one of them, you got me?" Mike let out an angry sigh.

"Yeah sure," he said turning around and heading to his bike.

"We are still talking today," Hopper yelled from the porch as Mike got on his bike. "Just because El sleepwalks doesn't mean I don't want her to go to this dance, okay kid? I can't hide her forever." Mike looked up from his bike.

"I guess I'll see you later," he said, turning his bike around and peddling away. Hopper let out a sigh, fishing his keys out of his pocket and headed for his truck. Today was going to be a long day.

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Mike was late to first period, but that didn't really bother him. Mrs. Peters sat at the front desk, her half-moon spectacles slipping down her nose as she wrote a tardy slip for Mike. He looked around the empty hall ways, wishing that the silence would go away.

"Go straight to class," she instructed Mike, he rolled his eyes while taking the slip from her. *Where else would I go*, he thought. He walked to Mr. Clark's class, his voice boomed down the hall as he talked about cells again. Mike appeared in the door way, walking in and handing the slip to Mr. Clark. He was putting on his best teacher face as Mike took a seat by his friends. All three of them gave him a weird look and he whispered, "I'll tell you later," under his breath.

"So," Dustin said as he let his lunch tray slam on the cafeteria table. "He just found her out there, screaming?" Everyone took a seat around the circular table, all watching Mike as he opened his milk.

"Something feels weird," Mike said looking around his friends. "I mean, weirder than it already does. Last time all of this happened our homes were swarmed by crazy government people, and now we don't even hear a word from them. Plus, it feels like somethings watching us." Max nodded her head in agreement.

"I thought I saw something in my room last night when I was trying to sleep." She said, spooning up some mac and cheese and inspecting it. "I don't know if it's just trauma, or if there is really something there." Lucas gave a little shiver, looking down at his food in disgust.

"How do we know the gate is really closed," he said quietly, looking around him. "I mean, yeah, El closed the gate, but what's stopping it from just coming back?"

"El opened the gate," Dustin said. He took a sip of his chocolate milk. "She would have to open it again; she's the one with the power to do that." Mike thought back to the breakfast they had all shared. El had talked about a sister.

"What if El's not the only one with powers?" They all looked at each other with concerned eyes. "Hawkin's lab has closed down," he continued, "but who says that's the only lab like that out there. What if they're all over the country? Doing the same thing that they were doing here?" Mike pushed his tray of food away from him, to antsy to eat.

"I don't like the sound of that," Dustin spooned in his mac and cheese, eating with a ferocity that would disgust anyone. The other three watch him as he took in one spoon after another. Dustin stopped and looked up at them, "What?" he asked with a mouth full of mac and cheese. Lucas shook his head and rolled his eyes.

"We keep our eyes and ears open," Mike said looking around at all of them.

"We can go take a look at the lab," Lucas said. "I still remember how to get to the tree I used to look past their gates." Max nodded her head.

"I'll go with you," she said. Mike and Dustin looked at one another.

Mike took his milk from the tray, taking a sip slowly, and thinking. Dustin continued to eat, while the rest of the party watched; thinking.

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El thought back to the time she first saw Hopper in the forest; knelt down by the wooden box, placing in some healthy food in a plastic container and some Eggo's on top. She smiled slightly, coming back to reality. She could feel a sweat building up around her body, her arms were bare and her feet were so hot it was making her feel sick. She tried to move, but her arms and legs felt like jelly, and the blankets that were stacked on top of her were too heavy.

"It's okay," Joyce's voice said next to her. El opened her eyes to see the mom with a mug of tea and a smile on her face. "Let's get some of these blankets off," She took one blanket off and then the other, leaving El with one thin soft comforter on top of her. She helped El slowly sit up, El took in a big breath, looking around at her surroundings. Will sat across from her, wrapped in his own blanket, asleep. Joyce handed her the mug when she knew she was stable enough to handle it, El took it gratefully.

"Thank you," she said lightly. She noticed the short sleeve shirt she was wearing, no bandages coving her arms, but burns where already going away.

"I hate bad dreams," Joyce said sitting next to her on the couch. "When I was your age my mother would always make me a hot tea after a bad dream. She said that the herbs and leafs were good for the soul. "Joyce gave a slight laugh at the memory. "My mom was always considered the loony I guess." El looked down at her tea, then back up to Joyce.

"I don't think it was a dream," El said quietly. "It's almost like I can feel her." She sat in silence, think about what she just said.

"Her, as in the girl that you saw?" Joyce asked look at her. El nodded her head looking at her with sad eyes.

"She's like me," she continued. "And she wants me to find her, but I

don't know if I want to." They both sat in silence for a moment; El took a sip of her tea and sighed at the taste of mint. It made her feel a different kind of warmth, it was a comfort. "I saw her with Papa," she said lowly. The front door opened quickly, and Hopper stomped into her room closing the door behind him. He looked over at her with a smile.

"Good morning sun shine," he said. She let a small smile play on her face. "Joyce," he said looking at her. "If I could steal Johnathan, I got you a pane of glass to fix this window." El looked behind her to see a piece of wood in the windows place. Joyce stood from her spot with a smile.

"Let me wake him," she said leaving the room. Hopper walked over, taking her seat on the couch. He looked down at El, but she was too scared to look back.

"I got some glass for our place too," he cleared his throat slightly and El could feel that he's uncomfortable. "I know you don't want to go back, honestly I don't either." El looked up at him. "I had lunch with Dr. Owen today," he said. He stood from his place on the couch, putting his palms to his eyes. "I'm trying to get this worked out." El looked back down at her tea.

"Promise," she said slowly.

"I promise," he said kneeling in front of her. "You deserve a better life," he said. "I don't know if that's living with me," he rambled off as Johnathan came into the room. Joyce stumbled into the kitchen, putting the kettle on the stove and turning it on. "Why don't you go into the kitchen," Hopper said walking to the front door. "You ready," He opened the door and Johnathan walked out first, Hopper watching as she stood and walked into the kitchen with her thin blanket and tea.

She watched from the table as Joyce went through her cabinets and recently cleaned fridge. She pulled out a carton of eggs, some bread, and container of coffee. She let the kettle whistle for just a second before filling one mug with tea, and another with coffee. She took them out to the boys on the front porch, leaving El to look around the kitchen alone.

"How do you feel," she heard Wills voice behind her. He walked in, blanket on his shoulder. "Honestly, that's my least favorite question," he continued taking a seat next to her at the dinner table. "Every time my mom asks me how I'm doing I just say fine so she will leave me alone." El slightly smiled at him and they stared at one another. "It's nice to finally meet you," he says shyly.

"Friends," she said taking the tea up to her lips. Will nodded his head and smiled.

"I feel like I know you without even knowing you," he says looking at her in hopes that she could understand. She nodded her head in agreement.

"A connection," she said with a smile.

"Yeah," he said.

"Are you okay Will?" Joyce came into the kitchen looking at them both. Will rolled his eyes and looked at El with a slight smile on his face.

"I'm fine mom," he said pulling the blanket closer to him. El let a small smile play on her face. She listened to Hopper instruct Johnathon on what to do. Hopper came into the living room to stand on the other side of the window as they both tried to fit the pane of glass in.

"I hope you guys are hungry," Joyce said. "I got extra eggs in preparation for people to stop by so we are going to have a feast today." El and Will nodded their heads in unison, just enjoying the silence of each other's company. "Mike should be getting out soon, and I'm sure the others will be close behind him." Joyce greased up a pan while cracking eggs into a bowl. El and Will watched in silence, listening to the guys fix the window and cuddle their blankets at the table.

...

The final bell rang for the day and Mike and Dustin rose from their seats in their history class. "Remember to read chapter five and six,"

their teacher yelled as the students quickly filed out of the door. They met Lucas at his locker, Dustin going into his own to get his back pack. Max came over with skate board, looking around the hall while they all kept their heads close to one another.

"Dustin and I will go to Wills, see if we can get the full story from El," Mike said. "You two head for the tree, and keep your eyes out for anything weird." Lucas nodded his head, looking into this backpack to find his wrist rocket and binoculars.

"You carry those with you on a regular basses?" Max asked giving him a funny look.

"You never know when you need to investigate," Lucas said. He closed his locker and they all walked out to their bikes.

...

It wasn't long until El and Will heard Jonathan greet the boys at the front door. Mike and Dustin filed in, Dustin gave a small wave to Hopper who grumbled and went back to working on the window. El looked over her shoulder at Mike as he walked into the kitchen. He gave Will a warm smile and a pat on the shoulder, and then came around his chair to say hi to El.

"How are you doing?" he asked, taking the seat next to her; scooting it closer. "Are you still cold?" he asked sitting down. Dustin came in, taking a seat across from her, a friendly smile on his face. El gave a slight smile, not really wanting to talk but just enjoy company.

"Lucas and Max were going to come, but they had other obligations," Dustin said. Mike kicked him under the table. El and Will looked at them funny. "What?" Dustin asked looking at Mike.

"Okay," Hopper said coming into the kitchen. "You now have a working window." Johnathan came in behind him; he looked around the kitchen then turned around.

"I'll get more chairs," he said lightly.

"It's perfect timing," Joyce said. "Not only did I make eggs, well try to make eggs, but" she turned around with a plate. "I also made some

pancakes," El gave her a warm smile, the sweet smell making her stomach yell.

"Breakfast in the afternoon?" Dustin said. Mike gave him a glare and then looked over to El.

"Have you had pancakes before?" she shook her head shyly and Mike smiled at her. "I think you're really going to like them." Joyce handed Hopper empty plates, and as he passed them around the table. She placed a plate filled with scrambled eggs and a plate full of round fluffs onto the table. She took the syrup from the cabinet handing it to El, giving her the okay to start plating her food.

Her first bite was like biting into a pillow. It was so soft and sweet, and she dared to think that it just might be better than a waffle. She didn't know how hungry she was until she began to spoon eggs into her mouth. Hopper, Mike, and Dustin ate their food at the same speed while the Byers watched El in curiosity.

"I like breakfast foods too," Will said quietly to her. "I think I could eat breakfast for every meal." El looked over at him with a mouth full of egg, trying to give the best lady like smile without being disgusting.

"So," Hopper interrupted. "I was thinking that since you have friends here, and you are feeling a little bit better." El looked over at him, slowly putting her fork down; not liking where his voice was going. "That maybe you would feel a little more comfortable to tell us what happened." El looked around the table, Joyce took a slow sip of her coffee, Johnathan looked down at his food, While Mike Will, and Dustin put down their forks; looking at her.

"I had a bad dream," she said quietly.

"A dream that wasn't like a dream at all," Joyce said. "You said it was like you can feel her." El looked down at her food. She shouldn't have told her that. "Is that how you got the scabs on your arms?" El nodded her head, looking over to Mike for a little bit of comfort. She looked back down at her bare arms; moving the blanket that had slid off her shoulders and putting it back up to hug closer. Mike nodded his head once to tell her to continue, and she looked over to Hop.

"I saw Papa," she said. Hopper let out a sigh and put his head in his hands with frustration. "He's looking for me."

"But I thought the Demogorgon got him," Dustin said. "Didn't he die in the school?"

"No one ever dies if you don't find the body," Mike said back. Will slightly flinched at the thought.

"Do you know where he is?" Hopper asked. "Could you go back into the void and figure it out?" She looked at Hopper sadly, not wanting to do it. It almost reminded her of how she used to live her life in the lab; how they would use her for information.

"No," She said, anger pulsed through her, and she didn't know where it was coming from. "I'm not looking for him, I don't want to find him, and I don't want to see him." A silence fell in the room as all members of the group looked at her with sad eyes. "I don't want to talk," she said, picking her fork back up.

"Okay," Mike said back looking around the table. He began to eat with her, while the other slowly picked up their forks again too. She thought back to the girl, *you have to help*, she had told El. Guilt ran through her, because honestly she didn't want to help anyone at this moment. *It follows you*, a slight chill ran down her back.

"Are you still cold?" Mike asked her, he took off his jacket and handed it to her. She gave him a soft smile, and put it on. She looked over to Hopper who rolled his eyes, stabbing some eggs onto his fork.

...

Lucas stood at the gates of the lab, he looked down one end and then at the other, Max followed his gaze. They had been quiet a good amount of the time there. Half way through the journey he had Max ride on the back of his bike, the roads becoming too hard for her to skate. They walked through the forest with his compass out as he acted like he knew where he was going; even though he got lost a few times.

"So," max said taking a closer look at the gate. "Now what?" Lucas

looked around at the trees, he recognized the one he had climbed before just a few feet to his left and walked his bike over to it.

"We climb and look over; we just want to see if there are still people there." Max followed him over to the tree. They discarded their bike and skate board onto the forest floor. Lucas cupped his hands to help Max up the tree; she raised her eyebrows at him, taking the help. *She can probably climb the tree herself you idiot*, Lucas thought to himself. He jumped up after her, almost losing his grip a few times on the cold branches.

They perched themselves halfway through the tree. Lucas opened up his bag; grabbing his binoculars. He peered through them, first looking at the building then taking a look at the parking lot. There were no lights shining through the windows, just a few cars sitting on the black top.

"I don't see anyone," he said, looking back to the windows, adjusting the lenses trying to see through the blinds.

"What do you think they did with the bodies?" Max said, grabbing the binoculars out of his hands and looking for herself.

"Like, the human bodies?" he asked, feeling uncomfortable with the thought of death.

"No, the other bodies; the Demidogs. Do you think they buried them, or are they doing experiments on them? Where would they even do the experiments?" Lucas let her questions hang in the air for a moment. He squinted at the building trying to think of an answer.

"Whatever their doing, I'm sure it's being done in a lab just like this one." He grabbed the binoculars back, looking back at the parking lot. "Why do you think there's cars there?" He asked.

"Maybe there are people still cleaning out stuff." Max shrugged her shoulders, looking with a thoughtful expression. Lucas kept his eyes on the front doors waiting for someone to walk out. He looked at each car, four in total, all white.

"Maybe they were extra cars, like from people that died that night."

He felt Max move next to him, adjusting herself on the branch.

"This is weird," she said lowly. "Who would have thought that moving to a small town could be so eventful?" Lucas took his gaze from the building lowering the binoculars to look at her. She played with her own fingers, her hair slightly flying in the cold breeze.

"Do you like it here?" he asked her. He thought about California, how it could be so warm and sunny right now, but she was stuck in this cold gray weather.

"It's growing on me," she looked at him with a smile. "I mean, people talk about California like it's this magical place, but it's just filled with a whole lot of suck for me."

"Why?" Lucas thought about Billy, about how it could be worse there than here.

"My mom," she said slowly, "she always chooses the same kind of guy, you know?" she sadly looked at Lucas shrugging her shoulders like it wasn't that big of a deal. "My mom says we left because of my dad, but really I think she's just embarrassed. She left my dad because he was abusive, but gets with this guy that can't hold his temper." She sat in silence for a moment. Lucas didn't know what to say, what to do. He looked down at the binoculars in his hands, thinking about his family; how good he had it. "I think she just didn't want our family and friends to see that she messed up again." At that moment a light boom erupted from the building beyond the fence. Lucas picked up his binoculars and looked for what the sound came from.

The lab was on fire, smoke coming out of the windows, and flames dancing in the black clouds.

"They set it on fire," Lucas said loudly. "They're burning it down!" Max took them out of his hands, getting a look for herself.

"There's people," she said loudly. Lucas took the binoculars throwing them over his eyes to see who was there. Three people ran out of the building, three men, all wearing doctor coats, smoke staining their face. They got into their separate cars, leaving one car behind.

"I think there's a person missing," Lucas said, looking back at the front door and then through the windows. "They all got into their own cars, but there's still one car left."

"What do we do?" Max began to head down the tree. "Should we tell the others, maybe the chief will know what's going on." Lucas followed her down. They both jumped from a branch, landing on the floor of the forest with an oomph. Lucas walked up to the gate. A sigh read, *High Voltage*, just a few feet away.

"I'm getting a closer look," he said taking his hand to the gate.

...

El tried her best at helping Joyce clean up after their afternoon breakfast. She stood with her by the sink, Mike's jacket on her shoulders, the blanket still sitting in her chair. She watched as Joyce put her hands into the warm water, she held a towel ready to dry.

"You don't have to help," Joyce said with a smile. In all honesty El really wanted to go sit with the others in the living room, but after Hopper took Mike aside into Wills room she couldn't stop fidgeting. She wanted something that could keep her busy, but she was starting to feel her legs give in.

"I think I might sit down," she said slowly. Joyce nodded her head, and El left the towel by her side to go into the living room.

"I'm thinking about asking someone, but Steve says it's all about getting the date when you get there." Dustin said while Will rolled his eyes.

"I'm not asking anyone," Will said. He looked up at El as she walked into the room. She took a seat in front of them on the floor, while they kept their seats on the couch. "I don't even know how to ask anyone out." He slightly blushed, and El let a smile play on her face.

"Hopper says I might be able to go," the boys looked at her with a smile.

"You would love it," Dustin said. "They play music, and everyone dances. They even have punch, although my mom makes the best

punch there is."

"Would we dance," she asked Dustin.

"I mean if you want to," he looked to Will and then back to her. "I'm sure Mike might kill me, but sure we can dance." El tilted her head at the thought, *why would he kill Dustin?* She listened to the boys for a little bit longer while Dustin told Will what he was missing at school. Everything he said sounded so new to her. Classes, other people's names, even the mention of lunch time and different food. *What was Mac'n Cheese?*

Hopper stomped into the room, with Mike on his heels, looking slightly happy, but sadness played in his eyes.

"Okay kiddo," he said. She looked up at him not wanting to hear what he had to say. "We are going to have to get out of here if we are going to want some windows in that cabin of ours." El rolled her eyes, but stood to her feet slowly.

"What happened to you windows," Dustin asked.

"Let's just say there was a disagreement," Hopper said looking back at El while she blushed. The boys stood from the couch while Hopper walked into the kitchen, grabbing his coat from the back of a chair and his keys from the table. He came back in looking at the teenagers as they awkwardly stood around one another. El looked over at Mike, and he looked back at her. "I'll wait in the car," he said awkwardly.

"I should probably be heading home," Dustin said walking into her view. He gave her a quick hug and a slight smile, following Hopper out of the front door.

"It was really nice to finally talk," Will said. They smiled at one another, and El went in giving him a hug. They let one another go, Will gave Mike a smile and walked past him in the kitchen.

"Hopper said you wanted to go to the dance," Mike walked closer to her. She nodded her head as he took her hands. "It's in two weeks," an awkward silence played between them while El searched his freckled face. "Please," he said lightly, "don't be late okay? I would

love to get in a dance with you before you disappear again." El could feel a stone clog her throat.

"I promise," she said in a thick voice.

"Well, it's in two weeks. Hopper says I won't be able to see you until then." El let out a frustrated breath. She looked down at their hands. "Just promise me you won't get into trouble before then." El let a smile play on her face again.

"Yeah," she giggled slightly. "No trouble." She gave Mike a hug, letting it last a little bit longer than any other hug she had gotten all day. They broke apart looking into one another's eyes both smiling at each other. El let her head move closer to his, wanting to feel his lips on hers.

A honk broke the silence making both of them dump apart in surprise. Mike rolled his eyes, and El let out a frustrating sigh. She started taking Mikes coat off, but he stopped her.

"Keep it," he said with a smile. "You might need it more than I do. Plus I have like, five coats back home." She gave him a grateful smile, putting the coat back in place. She gave him one last smile before moving toward to the front door and to Hops car. These next two weeks were going to be the worst.

5. Chapter 5

Chapter 7

Barbed wire was easier to climb over than he thought it would be. Lucas jumped from the top of the fence to the ground, the balls of his feet hurting on impact. He stared at Max on the other side of the fence while she looked at him like he was a lunatic.

"What are you, crazy?" she said loudly. "Did you not read the sign? High Voltage means deadly."

"Yeah and I'm not dead," he said back. "Just stay with the bike. My stuff is in my backpack. I'm just going to get a closer look." Max rolled her eyes at him as he turned his back and ran ahead into the trees. He could smell the smoke as he got closer; there were sounds of glass crashing and roar of the flames. He came to a road, looking up at the tall building. He had never been so close to it, but with the smoke covering his eyes it was hard to take in any detail.

Lucas decided he would keep his distance, but since there was still one car left he wanted to see if there was anyone left. He started running left down the road, coming to the parking lot, and running as close as he could to the front door. The wind picked up, smoke running into his lungs as he began to choke. He coughed hard, backing up down the front steps, back into the parking lot. He looked up into the windows, flames dancing with rage. He couldn't hear any screaming, just the faint sound of things combusting from the heat. He looked behind him at the white car that was left; walking to it slowly without taking his eyes off the building.

The inside of the car was a mess, cans of soda, old lunch, dirty cloths all littering the seats. Lucas made a face of disgust before looking back to the building debating if he wanted to go around to the other side of the building. He looked back into the car one more time before heading back around to getting to the back of the building.

Lucas walked on the back of the tree lining, throwing his hands over his face guarding it from the smoke. He looked through the back windows, looking just the same of the front of the building. He

stopped and listened carefully, trying to hear anyone that could still be in there. Branches broke behind him and he jumped; turning around quickly in an almost karate stance. Max ran in front of him with an annoyed look on her face.

"Hey you idiot!" She yelled at him over the sound of the fire. "Let's get out of here before the cops are called. The smoke is getting high." She grabbed his arm fiercely, dragging him through the trees. She was out of breath, and just by standing in the smoky area for a few seconds she already had soot building up on her pale face. "My mom is going to kill me," she said as they made their way back. "I smell like smoke." Lucas let her ramble in anger as he thought about the car; about the flaming building.

"Do you think anyone was in there?" He asked her as they began to jump over the fence. They both jumped from the top, Max sucking her finger from sticking it on the barbed wire.

"I'm sure there were a lot of things in that building," Max said, walking over to her skate board and picking it up. "They are burning it down for a reason; if there aren't bodies in there I would be surprised." She turned back around, walking back into the forest from which they came. Lucas rolled his eyes, looking back at the smoke in the sky; forming black clouds over the trees. He grabbed his bike and backpack, Following Max in silence.

...

El slightly shivered in her seat as she looked out of the truck window. She had remembered snow from last winter, but the last time she had seen it, it had stayed on the ground. Now it was just slightly wet, and colder than El ever remembers it being.

"These windows are going to take the rest of the day to put in." Hopper said into the silence. "The higher up ones are going to take some time; I might do those on a different day." She could see him look at her from the corners of her eyes, but she kept her eyes on the window. She could see the trees pass at a high speed, the slosh of the tires playing in her ears. "You are going to sit in bed," he continued. "If you don't want to get sick you are going to have to rest."

She already knew she was getting sick. Her throat hurt, it was hard to keep her head straight, and she had a stuffed nose she had never experienced before. She looked at the side mirror outside of her window, trying to remember the direction they took from the Byers house. She could see in the reflection dark clouds, and she frowned at the thought of thunder playing through her head for the rest of the day. She continued to look at the clouds, watching as they danced quickly up into the air.

"Look," she said in a raspy voice. She pointed to her mirror out of the window; Hopper looked in her direction, then out of the rearview mirror. She could feel Hopper quickly hit the brakes, she felt herself slightly fly forward, her seat belt keeping her in the seat.

"That's a fire," Hopper said, turning the car around in high speed. El slide into the car door, her eyes widening in fear. Hopper turned his radio on." Is there any call for a fire?" he yelled into the speaker.

"There hasn't been a 10-80 called in," a female's voice rang through the speaker. Hopper picked up his speed, El sat forward in her seat looking at the dark clouds at they grew in the sky

"I'm seeing some smoke clouds building in the sky," Hopper said back into the radio. "Stand by for back up," Hopper turned on his sirens, El slammed her hands over her ears in surprise. Everything was becoming so loud, and so fast. She looked out the window as they passed the Byers house in high speed; she felt herself slightly go forward as Hopper slowed the car down.

She could feel the panic rise as her and Hopper both realized where the smoke was coming from. He turned down Murkwood as El looked over the fence to the lab. Black smoke covered the area that used to be her home, and she could almost feel some sort of sickness as she saw the flames grow higher and higher. Hopper turned down the road that led into the grounds; no one was stationed at the gate. Hopper stopped the car, getting out and looking ahead of the closed gate that sat in front of him.

"Shit," he said quietly as he took off his hat and watched the building burn down. He dived into the truck, reaching for the receiver of the radio. "I'm going to need fire trucks and an ambulance at the

Hawkins Lab asap!" he yelled into the radio. He looked over to El and they locked eyes. "I'm going to have to take you to Will's okay," She nodded her head as he jumped back in the car and turned them around.

...

"Lucas slow down," Max yelled as they came onto Wills drive way. He knew exactly where the party would be, and he wanted to be the first one to tell them what they saw. He couldn't feel his fingers anymore as he gripped the bike handles, tugging Max on the back of his bike.

They came to Wills house in full speed; he could hear the sound of a siren behind them. Mike came out of the house, his face expressing concern.

"They," Lucas said, out of breath while trying to stop his bike. Max slammed into the back of him. "They set it on fire." He stepped off his bike, while Max fell from it. Mike came down the stairs of the patio, looking at Lucas in confusion. Lucas turned and pointed to the sky behind him. "The lab is on fire!" Mike came over, helping Max off the gravel while the sirens got closer.

"Why," Mike asked. Max dusted herself off with anger dancing in her eyes.

"I don't know," Lucas said with attitude. Hopper trucked turned down onto the gravel, the sirens deafening them as all three turned to look at his approach. His truck skid to a stop in front of them as El fell from the passenger door. Mike and Lucas ran over, Hopper turned off his siren.

"Don't do anything stupid," Hopper yelled; pointing at El. "Don't leave the house, and stay here until I come back." He looked over at Mike, and then his eyes focused on Lucas and then Max. "Why are you covered in smoke?!" He yelled.

"Umm," Lucas slightly backed up looking down at his clothes.

"I don't want to know," Hopper said back. El slammed the door shut, backing up into the party to let Hopper leave. They watched him turn

around, turning on his sirens as he left. Joyce came out the front door with Will and Jonathan close behind her.

"This idiot decided to run to the burning building," Max pointed her finger at Lucas.

"I thought there was someone in there," Lucas yelled back at her. "I had to check and make sure, it was my civic duty!" Max rolled her eyes, while Joyce came over and put her hands on Max's shoulders.

"Why don't we all come inside" her voice said slowly. "El, let's get you something warm." Lucas looked over to El, she covered herself in Mike's jacket. Dark circles brought her eyes down; her skin was paler than he could remember. They all turned towards the house, starting to walk slowly.

"How are you feeling," Lucas asked El, walking beside her.

"Fine," she said lowly. Mike let out a breath, rubbing his eyes with frustration.

...

Max and Lucas didn't stay long. They told their tale of the lab burning, and then Max checked the time with a curse, saying she was supposed to be under house arrest since she snuck out. Dustin had left right after El was gone the first time around; now it was just her and Mike sitting on the couch. His head laid back; tilting away from her as he slept. She looked out the newly replaced window.

She was worried about Hopper. She had never really seen a fire like that before; so big and bright. She couldn't really describe the feeling she had, the guilty relief that pulsed through her. She was happy to see the lab go. It was almost satisfying, a word she had learned from a call hot-line commercial that played late at night. All the same, she felt a homesickness she couldn't really understand. A home that she never loved, but was still sad to see it burn to the ground.

"Do you want some hot chocolate?" Will stood in the doorway of the kitchen and living room. He held two steaming mugs in his hands. She arched her eyebrows in confusion. She knew she liked chocolate,

but this looked nothing like what Hopper had given her.

"Hot chocolate," she said slowly, testing the word in her mouth.

"It's a drink," Will said. He slowly walked into the room; trying not to spill the hot drink with every step. He handed her a mug, and she took it gratefully while he looked over at Mike's sleeping body. Will took a seat in front of her, sitting cross legged on the floor. "Mike has always been the leader," Will said. El looked over at Mike before slipping from the couch to sit closer to Will on the floor. "This past year he hasn't been much of one." El thought about his statement, how he was always the voice of reason to the guys in the party.

El blew the steam from her drink, taking in the sweet smell of the chocolate. She could feel a slight shiver move down her back; she hugged the mug closer to her chest.

"You saw it," El looked up from her drink. Will's eyes gazed into hers. She looked at him; confused. "In your dream, you saw the Demogorgon." El closed her eyes for a second; images of the creature looming over her, its saliva falling from its open face. She could still smell the death that surrounded it, the smell of the upside-down.

"I think it was watching me," she said in a raspy voice. Her mind went back to the past few nights; how she felt something dark looming over her as she slept. She had thought it was the girl she had been seeing, but now it felt like something else. "I think it knows that I closed the gate." She opened her eyes and looked at Will, his gaze darkening as he stared at her.

"Could you open it again?" he asked. El slightly felt her stomach drop from his question. "I mean," he said shaking his head side to side with his eyes closed, "could you open it on accident again?" Will opened his eyes to look at her. She thought about the question. She knows she could open it again, but the amount of energy it would take; that something she didn't have at the moment.

"That won't happen," Mike's voice said from behind her. He still sounded tired; she looked behind her shoulder to look at him. He fixed his messy hair, placing his elbows on his knees. "Now that we know how it's been opened we can make sure it never happens

again." El looked away in disagreement. What if she lost control? What if someone else could open it?

I don't know what it is, but I can hear it in my sleep. Like the sound of an animal. The other girl had been seeing it. She was following it, just like El did when she opened the gate. She thought about what that could mean; where-ever that girl is she could fall into something she wasn't ready to face. She thought about where the girl could be, but every time she thought about it all she could hear where the words, *New York.*

"El," Mike grabbed her shoulder, throwing her out of her thoughts. She looked back down at her drink, then back up at Will. She could feel herself getting tired; her body becoming slightly warm.

"I think it could be opened again," she said. Her throat hurt at the feeling of speaking, she took a sip of the sweet drink; it smoothly went down her throat. It made her feel slightly nauseous. Her head was becoming heavy.

"It's not going to happen El," Mike said. He slid down to the floor and sat next to her. She looked over at him with a slight smile, happy at his optimism. "You have us now," El looked over at Will, his eyes darting to the floor. "We won't let that happen." Mike looked over to Will, he raised his head and nodded at Mike's words. El thought back to the word, *New York*, as it flashed in her head again.

"What's," El began, but started coughing. She felt like she was slowly choking, like she had something hot in her lungs. Mike put his hand on her back, but she couldn't stop herself; dropping the mug in front of her. Everything was going dark, and if there was noise around her she couldn't hear it.

The void, she looked around her to figure out why she was there. She could feel water fall from her mouth as she desperately tried to bring air in. She coughed water all over herself, bringing in a harsh breath to her desperate lungs. She could hear coughing from behind her, a faint cry with it.

"Tell me," a voice yelled, echoing off the watered floors. El looked behind her, still gasping for air. In the distance she could see the girl, Papa

looming over her body as she looked down at a small tub of water. "Where is she?" El stood from where she knelt on the ground, walking to her.

"No," the girl said threw sabs. He took her shaved head, throwing it back into the water. El couldn't breathe, she feel to the ground again, trying desperately to bring in air. She held onto her throat. He brought her head back above the water; El caught the cold air into her lungs.

"Where is she," El didn't know what was happening. How was this happening? She looked back El closed her eyes hard, trying to wake herself back up.

"New York," the girl said, she looked up at where El stood. "New York," Papa took her face in his hands.

"What did you say?" He looked into her face, she slightly laughed at him.

"I'm in New York," she said. He cursed under his breath, slapping her across the face. El felt the hit, putting her hand up to her right cheek. He threw her head back into the water, El tried to wake up.

...

Kali didn't know what it was, the black land scape. She had never really seen it, but new that there was a time when Jane had found a place to see her friends. She lifted her hand to her cheek, taking in a large breath of air. She had been drowning in the back of the van; choke as water filled her lungs. Now everyone looked at her, the van pulled over to the side of the road.

She looked around her, the sun had gone down, the overhead light in the van was on. They had been leaving Dallas, getting away from another hit and run they had done. She had gotten information, on a lab still open in Staten Island. *New York*. She let out her long breath, her head beginning to hurt.

"You okay Kali?" Mick got closer to her, looking into her face with concern. "Do you need some water or somethin'?" Kali let out a small laugh, the last thing she wanted was some water.

"We need to keep going to New York," she said to the group. "I know what we're going there for now." She lifted her palm to her nose,

feeling blood run out of it as she sat up. Everyone moved from where they sat, going back to their seats in the van, While Mick got back behind the wheel. They drove into the night, silence building as the rock music played on blast.

...

"El," she could hear Joyce's voice, it shook with unease, and really El couldn't figure out why. She was sleeping, really sleeping and she didn't want to open her eyes. She could feel a sting come onto her cheek, she groaned as she brought in a stinging breath. "El, please open your eyes," She slowly opened her eye lids. The living room light was hurting her eyes, and she was starting to feel the hit to her cheek that the girl had received on the right side of her face.

"El?" Mikes voice said, she looked straight up at the ceiling, his head coming into her view. She was still sitting on the floor; on her back. "What happened?" he asked her. She thought about it, what had happened? She wasn't sleeping, she wasn't even trying to get into the void; how did she get there?

"Water," she said, choking on her dry throat. "There was water." She didn't know where to start; she didn't know what to say. She began to sit up, but Mike put his hands on her shoulders and pushed her back down.

"We know," he said. "You were coughing up water like you were drowning." He placed one of his hands in her hair. She looked around her, Will sitting on the sofa, Johnathan in the kitchen door way. She slowly got up, ignoring Mike in his protest.

"Is Hopper back yet," she asked, looking for him around the room. The windows were darkened; the sun had gone down. The blood rushed from her head, her nose started to bleed. She felt like she had that thing called a hangover, the one that Hopper always complained about.

"He hasn't even called," Joyce said shaking her head. "What happened?" El felt like she was getting sick, she could feel it in her throat and the heat that was radiating off of her body. She could feel the drooping of her eyes, but tried to ignore the tiredness that was

growing over her limbs.

"I don't know," she said. She looked at Joyce, who took El's hands into hers. "It was the girl," She felt a chill run over her. "He was putting her in water." The room was silent as she thought. She honestly knew what was happening; papa was looking for her, but it was something more than that. There was more than just Papa and the lab. There was the girl, the darkness looming into her life.

Joyce took the silence as a cue, moving off the floor. El stood slowly, with the help of Mike, hugging his jacket for warmth.

"Are you cold?" he asked. She looked up at him, his eyes filled with concern; it almost looked like he had been crying. "You look like you're getting sick," he said leading her to the couch. The mug of hot chocolate still spilt on the floor. She could see a small spot of water where she had been coughing it up.

"Sick," El said nodding her head. Mike let a smile creep onto his face. They looked at one another, Will awkwardly sitting on the other side of the room. She thought about what happened before she saw the void. She wanted to know what New York was. "What's a New York?" She said the new words slowly, they sounded slightly familiar to something she had heard on T.V.

"That's a state," Mike said. "Like we live in Indiana, that's the name of the state. New York is a state, but it's also a big city." El thought about what he said. The girl was in New York, that's what she had said. "Do you understand?" Mike asked taking her hand. El looked into his eyes.

"Yes," she said with a grin.

They stayed on the couch until seven. Mike looked at his watch and sighed. El knew he had to leave, even though she was enjoying the silent company. Will sat across the room, the T.V. was on low; they were watching the local news. They showed a glow in the night, as the fire from the lab still wasn't contained. Joyce said she was happy to see it go, everyone slowly nodded, not knowing what else to say.

"I think I might have to go," Mike said lowly to her. Her eyes felt like

they were lowering, since her episode a few hours before she felt as if she was getting sick faster. Her head was hurting, her nose was getting more stuffed, and she could feel a slight sweat build up over her body. For the first time ever she wanted to go back home, to the cabin, and have no one look at her while she hid under her covers. "El, are you okay?"

His voice took her out of her thought of home. She looked at him, trying to brighten her face like nothing was wrong. She could feel red spread across her face, but not from a blush, from a heat wave.

"I'm fine," she said through a raspy voice. She coughed slight and Mike and Will sat up straighter, getting ready for her to go back in the void. She just cleared her throat, looking at them both with annoyance. "I'm fine," she said a little stronger. She stood from her seat on the couch, looking out the window when she saw head lights come into view. Hoppers truck stopped in front of the Byers home, he stepped out of his truck.

"Now I really have to go," Mike said. He stood with El, looking down into her eyes, squinting as if trying to figure something out. Hopper come through the front door, Will jumped slightly at the intrusion.

"You're not looking to good kid," Hopper said, coming into the living room, getting a closer look at her.

"That's because she's sick," Mike said. He took her hand a squeezed it. "How's the lab, do you know who did it yet?"

"No, it won't stop burning. Which means it was probably set up to completely burn it down." El looked over to Will, who quietly slumped back into his seat, looking at the T.V. commercials.

"Hopper," Joyce came into the room. They looked at one another closely, Hopper taking the hint and walking with her into the kitchen. El and the boys watched them go; while El silently cursed to the fact that they were going to be talking about her.

"It'll be okay," Mike said. He went to the front door, his backpack sitting on the floor. "My mom's going to kill me if I don't make it home by dinner." He said shrugging his shoulders. He walked back

over to El, putting his back pack on his back. They looked at one another, and El couldn't get a grasp of her emotions. They both went in and hugged one another, letting it last for as long as it could.

"Hey kiddo," Hoppers voice came softly from the kitchen door way. "We gotta go," El and Mike broke apart, Mike giving a small smile while walking out of the house.

2 Weeks Later

El and Hopper had a long discussion about her dreams, more like visions. She had been sick for days, and Hopper was very adamant about how she was going to get real sleep, and she needed to stay out of the void. In return she told him that she couldn't help it sometimes, and that sometimes the darkness was too loud to let her sleep.

They never talked about the Snow Ball until a few days before. Hopper had been gone for the day, she was sitting on the couch watching MTV in aww as a man named Michael dance across the screen. She balanced a hot cup of tea in her lap, while eating a bowl of soup. The windows of the cabin had been fixed, the fire was going, but she still felt cold from her time of hypothermia.

She listened to the music, humming to the tune. She heard the secret knock at the door, stopping her motion for a second because he was home really early. She thought about who it could be other than Hop, no one, she thought, because no one knows where I am. She let the locks unlock while she went back to her soup.

Hopper came through the door, putting his hat up while letting a cold breeze in to the living space. El sent him a death glare with a mouth full of soup, and he closed the door with an innocent smile.

"How are you feeling," he asked; a question he had been using with her a lot. She shrugged, she wasn't bad, but she wasn't feeling good either. "I have a surprise for you, but first I wanted to talk to you about something." His words made her perk up a little bit; watching as he walked over to her with a white envelope. He walked over to the T.V., lowering the sound before taking a seat on the coffee table in front of her. "I had lunch with Dr. Owen today." El passed him the

soup; he lowered the bowl onto the table next to him. She sat up a little more to listen. "He said we have to wait another year." El could feel herself deflate. Another year of no one, of no talking, of no fun. She thought about the Snow Ball, of how she was going to miss another year. "But, I thought you could at least have one night," he said with a smile. "I'm having Joyce go out to find a dress for you, and some real shoes, other than those convers you always wear." El could feel a fire in her ignite, a smile spread across her face.

"When do I get to go?" she said. After so many days of being in the middle of nowhere she was starting to forget her days, and since she couldn't go into the void she didn't have Mike telling her his daily count on how long they had been apart.

"In two days," he said. "I told Mike weeks ago that I was going to do my best to get you there, he didn't look so hopeful the last time I saw him." El raised her eyebrows.

"When did you see him," Hopper rolled his eyes at the question.

"He comes by the station all the time," Hopper said. "Always asking if you're okay, making sure you got the right cold medicine, wanting to know if you could come to Will's for dinner one day so everyone can see you." El smiled at the thought.

"Could we go to Will's?" It was a hopeful question; one she knew wouldn't get a real answer because he didn't want to disappoint her. She looked at the envelope in his hands while he tried to form an answer to her question. "What is that?" she point to the paper. He stared at her for a moment before clearing his throat.

"That's another surprise," he said softly. "We haven't really talked about it, but when we were back at the lab that night I told Owen that he will help let you live a normal life." El nodded, remembering the conversation in the stair well. "This," he said holding up the envelope, "is what will help with that. It can get you into school, and help you get an I.D." El took it from his hands eagerly, opening the flap. She took out a folded paper. *Birth Certificate*, it read at the top.

"Jane Hopper," she slowly read out loud. She let a smile play across her face, liking the feeling of seeing her name with his.

"We don't have to call you Jane," Hopper said. "El can be your name among friends, but when you are out in public and I introduce you, because at some point I'm going to have to tell people you are here, I'm going to have to say your name is Jane." El looked back down at the paper, *Birth Date*, she read, *March 31st 1971*.

"Birthday," she slowly said. She didn't remember ever having a birthday before, but knew what it was through the television.

"Yeah kid," Hopper said, ruffling her hair. He gave her a watery smile as she folded the paper back up with care, placing it back in the envelope.

"School?" she asked.

"We still have to wait a year," Hopper said to her. "I want you to be doing more reading and studying, not as much T.V." he said pointing his thumb behind him at the lit up screen. El thought about this, how she hated reading because it was so hard. "It's going to be hard," Hopper said. "But nothing good ever comes easy."

...

Mike sat with the guys on the side walk outside of school; they were watching Max do different tricks on her skate board. Will had finally returned from recovering; he once again was the talk of the school. Other kids asked him where he went, if he had died again, and wanted to know if he was going crazy. Mike was getting frustrated; having to stick up for Will since he was so soft spoken. He had almost fought Troy a few days before, while he sang ZombieBoy down the hall way.

"Is there going to be food at this dance?" Max asked as she balanced herself on the back two wheels of her skate board. The boys all watched as she placed the front of the board back onto the ground.

"I hope so," Dustin said. "We never went last year, Will was still sick and El was gone." Lucas nodded his head and Mike stuck his hand into his coat pocket. He didn't want to go home, but he didn't want to be here. He was starting to get annoyed with this dance. Ever since the last time she had seen El the hope of her coming with him to the

Snow Ball was dwindling.

Mike stood from his spot on the concrete, grabbing his backpack as he went. He was going to go see Hopper; try to convince him for the hundredth time why El should go to the Snow Ball.

"Where are you going," Will said beside him. Mike looked down at the guys while Max skated closer to them.

"I'm going to go see Hopper," Mike said. He could see Max and Lucas rolled their eyes at each other, a secrete look that they had been using for the past few weeks. Mike could feel a little bit of anger build within him.

"Tell him," Dustin began, "That we would love to see El, and that he still hasn't returned my mother's call about the dogs next door." They all rolled their eyes at his last statement. "What, they keep getting in to her garden; she was working so hard to keep everything alive all winter." Mike walked over to his bike, unlocking it, hopping on.

"Hey Mike," Will called from behind him. Mike stopped his motions and sat on the seat of the bicycle as Will walked over to him. "Do you think we'll have fun at the dance?" Mike thought about the question, raising his eyebrows.

"I think we could have fun anywhere," Mike said, "but I also think that if we don't go to this dance our mothers are going to kill us." Will snickered at his statement.

"I'm sure my mom would be fine with me staying home," Will said.

"You should go," Mike wheeled his bike closer to him. "I think it's good for you to get out more."

"I just," Will stopped, thinking out what he wanted to say. "I just, have never really talked to girls before, and I know that if I don't dance with one than I will always be the Zombie Fairy Boy."

"Well," Mike said, "if no one asks you to dance than I won't dance either. We can just sit and make fun of all the losers dancing." They both smiled at each other, Will turned around, walking back to the group. And Mike headed on his way.

Mike walked through the front doors of the Hawkins police department, ringing the bell at the front desk, but instead on the nice older women that always greeted him he was met face to face with Steve Harrington. Steve rolled his eyes at him, while Mike wondered what would possess anyone from giving this guy a job.

"What are you doing here," they both said at the same time. Mike rolled his eyes while Steve moved the papers he was working on out of the way.

"I'm here to see Hopper," Mike said. He looked past the small hall way into the open floor of the department. Two cops sat at their desks, one with his feet up, and the other blowing bubbles with his chewing gun.

"Well he's not here," Steve said. "He also told me not to let kids into his office; I'm guessing he met you." Mike raised his eyebrows at him.

"When is he getting back?" he looked down at his watch, it read 3:50. "He's not coming back is he," Mike said looking back up at Steve.

"He's done for the day, he said he had a lunch meeting and then had somewhere to be." Mike sighed, not knowing what to do next. He desperately didn't want to go home and face the music of his parents. His mother had been fuming lately, over what, Mike didn't know. The angry glancing at his father and the constant wine drinking was starting to drive him crazy and he didn't want to be a part of it any more.

"I'm sure you and I both know where he is right now," Steve said pulling Mike out of his thoughts. "I'm sure she's fine, just go home and play Dragons and Dudgeons or whatever."

"It's Dudgeons and Dragons," Mike said with annoyance, "and you don't just play it. There's planning and writing and hours on end of strategies that-"

"Kid," Steve interrupted, "I have things to do." Mike left the building in defeat. He would have to go on without knowing if she was going to be there or not. He felt sour at the fact that another Snow Ball would go by without her. As he rode home he felt the old him

coming back, the anger, and the sadness. He was going to go home to his basement and talk.

...

Two days later

She had been pacing all day. She thought of the void, the looming of the darkness over her shoulder wasn't bothering her. She was just worried about what she was going to wear, and how her hair was going to look less like a ball of fuzz, and more like the girls she had seen through movie and shows.

She had taken a shower early, had her lunch, watched some television, and even read a few really hard chapters in Matilda. She had even cleaned out the fridge, the smell of old veggies that her and Hopper were finding hard to eat, going bad. It wasn't until it hit four in the afternoon that she could feel the knots in her stomach. Hopper was going to be home with her dress, and they only had a few hours to figure out what to do with the mess of her hair.

She couldn't wait to see Mike. She wanted to watch the boys as they argued, and she also wanted to see what it was like to be around Max. She was nervous to be around a girl, mostly because she had started that relationship off rocky.

El looked down at her nails, half of them bit off while the other half were uneven. She knew that girls used paint to color them and make them look pretty, but she had never seen it done in real life. She checked out her face in the mirror, her teeth uneven, and her skin slightly red. She looked pale, and not tan like Max. She looked nothing like the girls she would see in pictures, and nothing like the girls that went to Mike's school.

She heard the knocks come from the front door, unlocking it before he was done. He came into the cabin quickly holding a long bag that she assumed was her dress. He gave her a happy smile, but for some reason she couldn't produce one back.

"You okay kiddo," he said putting his hat up and taking his belt off. She nodded her head not sure what to say. "I hope this dress fits you,

Joyce said it should go with the color of your hair." He shrugged his shoulders, handing her the bag to look. She lifted the bottom, the dress spilling out from under it. It was a blue long dress and a pink belt was wrapped around the hanger. "Why don't you try it on," he said. "I forgot the shoes in the car." He turned back around while she head for her room.

She threw her overalls off, taking the dress carefully off the hanger and onto her body. For a moment she didn't know what she was going, she didn't know which way the dress should face and she was having a hard time getting it down her small curve. By the time Hopper made it back inside she was able to fix the belt onto her waist. She walked out into the living area where Hopper handed her the shoes.

"Wow," he said. "You actually look like a girl." El slightly smacked him; opening the box to see two pink flats. The nicest shoes she'll ever wear. "We need to figure out this hair," Hopper said trying to move some of the curls out of her face. "It's starting to grow so fast."

"I like it long," she said with a smile.

It took Hop twenty minutes of messing with two clips and some gel to get her hair to stay in place. They drove in silence in the car as she looked out the window. The sun had gone down and she was starting to get a little cold from the winter chill that hung on the truck windows. She didn't know what to expect, but her nerve were telling her that something was going to happen that would embarrass her and she didn't know what.

"Are you sure you want to do this," Hopper said slowing down as he got deeper into town. He had been asking her this question since he gave her the birth certificate two days ago.

"Yes," she said simply. "It was a promise."

"Right," Hopper said. They pulled into the school; he parked his car further away so they wouldn't be seen. "Just go in and get yourself a ticket to hang your jacket. Make sure to act confident so people don't know you're not supposed to be there." El nodded her head. Looking to the gymnasium door as Dustin walked in. She felt excitement,

seeing someone she knew. "Also," Hopper continued, "I wanted you to have something." He pulled his blue bracelet from his wrist, pulling her arm towards him and slipping it on. "My daughter made it when she was in the hospital. She tied some strings together for a friendship bracelet and gave it to me. Blue was her favorite color." El looked down at her wrist; he tightened the string around it, making it fit her small arm. "Make sure you keep it safe, okay kid," she felt herself smile up at him while he gave a small kiss into her hair.

She stepped out into the cold, Hopper watching as she made her way to the front doors of the gymnasium. She greeted the woman at the front table, giving her jacket as Hopper instructed her to do, and step into the dance room. The music playing louder than she had ever heard, kids dancing with one another, and people laughing as the song went on. She searched back and forth before finding him, standing just across from her. She could feel herself smile as she watched him make his way towards her.

"You look beautiful," he said breathlessly. She slightly looked down at herself, finally feeling like a normal girl. "Do you want to dance," he asked. She looked around at all the other kids, feeling her self-confidence go down by the second.

"I don't know how," she suddenly felt ashamed of herself. Why didn't she think of this, why didn't Hopper mention there would be dancing. She's never danced in her life.

"I don't know either," Mike said to her. She looked up at his eyes feeling a little less embarrassed. "Do you want to figure it out," she could feel his hand in hers as he led her onto the dance floor; showing her where to put her hands while he put his on her hips. They swayed to the song, a song she had never heard before. They looked into one another's eyes; their heads moving closer without even meaning to. El felt like there was a magnet in her head, moving her towards Mike's lips. She thought about their first kiss, how at the time she didn't even know what it meant.

It was like taking in cold air after being stuck inside all day. It was fresh and fast, but just as she remembered it being, and she was happy that she finally got her chance to kiss him back. A year of waiting, and the thinking was driving her crazy, but now she was

able to show him that she was growing, and changing. The song stopped, and so did they.

"Do you want to go find the others," he asked as a faster song started to play. She looked around at the other kids, finding Dustin a small distance away with Nancy. She grabbed Mike's arm, moving through the sea of students dancing to get to him. Dustin looked over with a surprised face.

"You made it," he said giving her a hug. She smiled and let a small giggle play out of her mouth. "Wow, you look nice," El looked up at him, as she felt concern play on her features.

"What happened?" she asked raising her hands to his hair.

"Seriously," Dustin said dryly as Mike laughed beside her. "This is called fashion," he said moving her hand from his hair. Nancy excused herself from the group, moving back to the punch bowl. El felt something tingle down her neck, causing the hairs on her arms to stand on end. She looked around her while Mike made fun of Dustin; Will came walking out of the crowd looking at her.

"Hey," he said breathlessly. He let a small smile escape her lips, she let one slip too. She felt electricity in the air as he got closer, making her feel uneasy.

"How was your dance?" Dustin said in a sing-song voice.

"Shut up," Will said, red spreading across his cheek. All three of the boys smiled while El stood watching them.

"El," Lucas's voice boomed from behind her, she turned to see him and Max walk out from the crowd. Max gave her a soft smile and El gave one back.

"Why don't we find a table," Mike said. "We can get some punch and just hang out." Everyone nodded in agreement while Mike took her hand walking her towards Nancy and the table she stood behind. "This is punch," he said getting closer to the table. "I think you'll like it," Nancy smiled at them, handing El a cup. She looked down at the red water, her mind going towards the thought of blood; dripping

from her nose as she tried to close the gate. The large beast staring at her through the gate as it closed; hearing herself scream as she willed herself not to lose. "Are you okay?" Mikes voice took her out of her daze; she looked up from her drink and took a sip. The flavor of cherry playing on her tongue. She liked it.

"I'm great," she said. They walked over to a table the party had grabbed. A Warmth filled her that she hadn't felt in a long time.

6. Chapter 6

Two Weeks Ago

She had spent most of the drive paying attention to what was behind her. She knew that the cops were looking for them; their van wasn't easy to hide especially when you're going a hundred miles per hour down the high way. She was upset more than anything. She didn't know why she didn't think there would be more after meeting Jane, and yet she ignored her feelings of finding a family to kill those that made her life a living hell.

"We're coming up to traffic," Mick said as she slowed her driving down. They were headed to New York City, a place she had never seen before. It couldn't be as bad as Chicago, busy streets and rude people. She thought that maybe it would feel more like home than anything else, but that's not what they were there for. They were there for a girl, which was being tortured through the man named Brenner, or to Jane *Papa*.

They're plan was simple; go in, get the girl, get out. She knew that after tonight she would be drained, and getting out of the city was going to be a task. She had spent most of the two days traveling, sleeping and eating. She was trying to get the rest she needed for what was to come, and she could feel her mind tingling with electricity after not using her power for so long.

"How many men do you think will be in there?" Axel asked. He sat with his head resting on the window, his long legs stretched out across the back seat floor. She could still smell the mud from his black boots after leaving Dallas in a rush.

"A hundred or more," Ray grumbled. She could hear Dottie give an excited giggle in the very back of the van, Kali rolled her eyes. She slouched in her seat as they passed the *Welcome to New York* sign.

"We have what we need," Kali said lowly. "You have guns, and I have me so it should be fine. Just don't forget what the main mission is; get the girl and get out."

"How do we know this girl is safe?" Mick asked from behind the wheel. "I mean, what if this is what they want; for you to come?"

"They won't get me," Kali said with a sigh. She picked at her nails, looking down at the number stamped on her left arm. "We just need to focus."

They drove in silence for the next hour, slowly making their way through the state to get to the city. She remembered when she was younger; sitting in a white room with a puzzle. A map of the United States, she would solve the puzzle at least once or twice a week. Now she was finally traveling it, like she always wanted to. Except she was doing things she never truly wanted to do.

I can save them, Jane had said. She had everything someone like them would want; people that understood her, people that looked out for her. Didn't she have that too? She had Mick, the one that looked out for her. She had Axel, the brother she always wanted. Ray, a slight father figure, maybe uncle now that she thought about it. Dottie, the weirdo of the pack that she, for some reason, felt a sisterly connection to.

"You okay," Mick said softly looking through the traffic to find the right traffic sign to follow.

"I just hope we're doing the right thing." She didn't really know she was feeling it until she said it out loud. She bit her thumb nail while sitting up straighter to look at the side mirror out her window. Cars lined from behind them as they sat in traffic, Mick followed the sign to Goethals Bridge.

"We should almost be there," Mick said. "This bridge takes us to Staten Island; from there it's just finding the hospital. What was the name again?"

"Sunrise Sanatorium," Kali said, "the old man said it's not hard to find; right on the water. Has a gray scary look to it." She thought back to the old man that she killed. She felt guilt spread across her as soon as she had done it; taking the kill shot when it wasn't needed. He was old, barley able to walk. She felt the need to end it; to show them that she didn't show mercy to anyone.

Mick exited the bridge after sitting for far too long, the slight glow from the city making the world a little bit brighter. She looked through the streets, reading every sign they came across. They went down each major road, looking past buildings to see if they were near water.

"There!" Ray said as they came across an old castle like building. Mick slammed on her breaks, turning around the park across the street. She could hear the group behind her start checking their guns, Ray pulling on figureless gloves and punching into his hands.

"I think we should wait a minute," Kali said. She looked out her window and across the street. "Let me get the layout of what I can see. We should watch to see if anything is happening before we walk in." They sat in silence, all watching out the windows with their masks in their hands.

Kali looked at the small clock that sat above their radio. They had been sitting for a few hours, waiting for the late night to come before they decided anything. She watched out the window, seeing some doctors come and go throughout the few hours of them being there. There wasn't much to notice, three stories, and no lock gate, no one standing guard that she could see. For a small while she thought they could be at the wrong place, but then she saw it; a white van with the words *New York Electric* stamped on the side. That couldn't be a coincidence.

"12:30," Mick said.

"I think we should just go in guns blazing," Axel said messing with his gun. "I'm sure at this time of night they won't have as many people on guard."

"Or they will," Ray said through a sleep sneer. "These people aren't stupid."

"Shh," Kali hushed. She closed her eyes, thinking hard. She tried picturing the girl again, how her head was shaved, and a hospital dressing gown on her small frame. She was pale, so pale. Kali could feel blood dripping from her nose as the girl appeared in her mind, sitting on her small bed, her knees to her chest. She looked cold, but

didn't shiver. She was alone, as far as Kali could see. "Let's go," she said harshly. They all threw their masks on, slamming their car doors as they stomped across the street.

"Stay with me," Kali said as they came up the steps of the building. "Never leave the group. We look through each room before we find her, we start top to bottom." They came to the front doors, looking at the bard windows. Kali slowly opened the door, peeking through the holes of her mask to see clean white walls, a front office in front of them. A woman sat behind a desk, a large door stood behind her. She looked up from her magazine quickly taken off guard to what she was seeing. Kali looked at the cat figurines that lined the women's desk, making her see kittens run through the front door.

The women jump from her chair, leaving a space between her and the doors; running to the pretend kittens that played on the floor. Kali pushed through the door, a long white hallway. She looked to her right, just a wall, and then to her left; a stair case. She pushed through the doors. They climbed the stairs in a rush, coming to the third floor. A door with a lock pad sat in front of them.

"Great," Axel muffled voice said through his mask. "You don't happen to know how to pick a lock like this do you?" he asked Dottie. She shook her head, her big hair moving side to side. Ray pushed through from the back of the group, grabbing the handle, pulling once, twice, third times a charm. The door broke open; Kali let out a breath she didn't know she was holding.

Kali peering through a small crack in the door, the light in the hallway dimmed; the hall looking different than the first floor. Each door had a lock; opened by a card. Kali could feel a pull, like she was being pulled by a magnetic force. She opened the door a little wider, taking a left down the hall way, walking halfway down before stopping. Mick bumped into her back, the rest of the group coming to a stop. She could feel her inside churning, she was being pulled to the door to her right, and she felt like she was going to be sick.

"Here," she said slowly turning to the door, putting her hand on the frame.

"Hey!" Everyone turned to look down the hall, a man in a lab coat

appeared around the corner. He began to run towards them, Axel lifted his gun. Ray took the door handle, while he slammed his body against it metal door. Kali turned to Axel in panic, not wanting to alert anyone else. She pulled down his gun while looking at the man running towards them. The man stopped in his tracks, his eyes tearing up in shock. "Mom?" he said through a gasp. The metal door busted open beside them.

Kali turned as she heard a squeak of fear come from the room. She brushed past Ray, still listening to the man cry in the hall. The girl stood from her bed, fear etched on her face.

"Come," kali said. The girl looked at her with confusion. Kali lifter her mask to look at her. She walked closer to the girl, grabbing her arm. She felt a shock run through her veins, her blood starting to boil. The girl glared down at her while Kali fell to her knees. "I'm here to help," Kali gasped as she felt her heart race. She tried to lift her hand from the girls arm, but the grip of her hand wouldn't let go.

The girls eyes soften, Kali felt her heart slow down. She was able to take in steady breaths, feeling the pain lessen throughout her body. *What was that?*

"We need to go," Mick said in a panicked voice. The girl looked over to the door way, and then back at Kali.

"Please," Kali said, standing back up. "We need to get you out of here." The girl debated in her head before nodding and letting Kali lead her out of the room.

"Hey," The man said through his tears. He sat on the hall way floor, looking at them. "What have you done?" he said in fear.

"Now you can," Kali said to Axel before letting her mask fall back on her face. Axel pointed his gun at the man, firing as they began to rush back down the hall. A group of doctor came running towards them from the other end, all yelling. Dottie pulled a gun up, firing as they came to the doors of the staircase. Ray took one of the men in his arms, throwing his against the wall. Kali kept her hands around the girl's small arm, pulling her to the stairs. They girl struggled to stay on her own two feet.

It wasn't until they got to the bottom of the stairs that Kali realized they had an entire squad of people following them. Kali opened the door, rushing to where they had come from. She could hear the girl's raspy breaths as they got to the front office from which they had entered. The room filled with men with guns, Brenner in front of all of them.

"Well," They all stopped in their tracks; men in front and behind them. "You're not the one I was looking for," Brenner said with a smile. Kali looked into his eyes, feeling a cold spread through her. She kept her hand on the girl, making sure she didn't go anywhere. She let her eyes fall, looking into the darkness of her mind as she pictured a dark room filled with the noise of screeching. She opened her eyes to Brenner putting his hands to his ears, looking around him in confusion.

The group began to walk, while the room looked around in a darkness that wasn't there, their hands to their ears as if the noise pained them. They made it out of the front door in a rush, Kali starting to feel a little more weaker as they made their way down the stairs and across the street. The girl let out a cry of almost relief, as they filled into the van and sped over the Goethals Bridge.

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2 Weeks later

Snow Ball

EL couldn't remember ever laughing so much in her life. The smile on her face felt permanent for the time being, and she could tell her friends were having fun making her laugh. She looked through the sea of people on the dance floor. Hopper and Joyce sat high in the bleachers, she wondered how long they had been there, but didn't care that they had been watching.

"Are you a Jedi master?" Dustin said to Max, wiggling his eye brows, "Because Yoda-Licious." El didn't understand the joke, and Mike shook in head next to her.

"Is that the best you got loser?" Max shot back. "You guys are so

lame."

El thought about her night, dancing, kissing, and even some punch. She looked at the empty cups on the table, picking up the paper cup and looking at it. She thought about all the things she still hadn't seen.

"My mom said we might go to the city for Christmas," Lucas said to the group. El put the cup back down, listening. "Her sister just had a baby so we are going to go see it or something."

"My dad hates the city," Mike said beside her. She looked over at him, slightly surprised because she honestly forgot about Mike's dad. He never talks about him. "I don't know if it's because my mom's family lives there now, or if it has do with how many hippies are there." El didn't understand what that meant, but looked around the table to see everyone else's reaction.

"I've never been to Indianapolis," Max said looking around at everyone. "If it's anything like LA I would say that there must be a lot of hippies living there." Everyone smiled, El followed their lead.

"Hey Will," Joyce said coming through the crowd, Hopper following behind. "It's getting late," she said shyly to the table. El looked over at Will who tried to hide an eye roll. She knew her time was coming; looking back over to Hopper. He gave her a sad smile; she nodded her head before he turned to leave to the parking lot. She looked over to Mike, and then the rest of the group. She stood from her seat while Will said bye to everyone. He looked at her last, their eyes connecting, his drifting away from her quickly. She felt a shift inside of her, but ignored it as she stood to leave.

"I'll walk you out," Mike said standing with her. She looked at the rest of her friends as they rolled their eyes at them. "I'll be right back," he said to the rest of them.

Dustin moved from his seat, giving El a hug as she came around the table. "Merry Christmas," he said to her. Lucas and Max smiled as they walked away from the table; El thinking about the words that Dustin just shared with her. Mike stood with her as she turned her ticket in and got her jacket back, they walked out to the front steps

on the building. Hoppers truck stayed in the distance of the parking lot, trying to be inconspicuous to who she was going home with.

"I'm happy you were able to come tonight," Mike's voice was muffled by a few shivers that he gave from the cold. She looked at him with a smile, his eyes searching hers.

"What is Merry Christmas?" she asked. Mike turned his head sideways at her question. "Dustin just told me, Merry Christmas."

"It's like happy Christmas, or have a good Christmas." Mike smiled at his explanation, she slightly smiled back. Will she have a good Christmas? A breeze picked up behind her, sending a chill down her spine. She gave a shiver, feeling a dark cold spread through her. She frowned at the thought, looking around her as if she would be able to see the dark force circling her. "Are you okay?"

"Yes," El said quickly. "Just thinking about Christmas. Hopper said something about finding a tree." Mike gave her a smile. "I should go," she said shyly. They looked at one another, neither one of them wanting to move.

"Maybe I can see you before Christmas. I can come and give you a present." EL thought about all the black and white movies she watched, how the man would always buy the beautiful women necklaces and drape them over their necks. She thought about Hopper, and the three rules she had to live by.

"Maybe," she said, looking over to Hoppers truck. She gave Mike a hug; he put his arms over her shoulders, engulfing her.

"I know I'll see you soon." Mike said before they pulled apart. "If I annoy Hopper enough he'll give in." They both smiled at the thought. She gave his hand a squeeze, before turning to head for the truck. He kept her hand in his, turning her back around. "I'll be talking," he said to her. "I'll be on channel eleven, if you ever need to listen." She nodded her head in understand, before turning back around and heading for the truck.

The further they got from the school the more she started to realize how cold she really was. She could feel it again, something dark

looking over her shoulder. For the past two weeks she was able to keep it at bay. Never going into the void, and never getting pulled in. Everything had been quiet, but for tonight, when she looked at Will, it was like it was clouding him; sucking her under along with it. She felt this tug in her gut, like a magnet telling her to go somewhere, but she didn't want to follow it.

"Did you have fun?" Hopper asked into the silence of the truck. El smiled at her thoughts of the dance, it was everything she had hoped it would be.

"Mike and I danced," she said looking over to him with a smile. Her stomach tugged again as he got further away from the town.

"Well," Hopper said, "as long as he kept it PG." She looked at him with confusion at what he meant. "He was nice to you right?" El rolled her eyes at his question, looking back out the window. She felt another tug, making her stomach turn over slightly. She looked through the trees as they flew past them, as if she would find the answer there. "I know tomorrows Saturday," Hopper began to talk ago, "but I have been ignoring Dustin's mom for like a week and a half now. Something about their neighbors dogs, so I'm going to check that out in the morning." EL nodded at his words, not really Knowing what any of it meant, but happy that she would get to sleep in. "I think that would be a good time for you to get some studying in so I can look at it after I get back, kill two birds with one stone." She looked over at him.

"Killing birds?" she asked.

"It's just a saying," He said back. They drove the rest of the way in silence. She could feel her eyes getting ready to fall once he parked his truck in the woods. She opened her door, hopping out into the cold air. She could see her breath in front of her as if came out in puffs. She looked out into the darkness of the trees, feeling eyes that she couldn't see. "Let's go before you freeze." Hopper said over his shoulder as he began to walk. She took one more look into the trees, before following him back home.

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It wasn't until Mike lay in bed that he realized how much he needed tonight. He could feel a weight off of his chest as he not only got to see El, but he got to watch everyone act as if nothing was wrong. It almost felt normal to sit in the school gymnasium, with cheesy dance music playing as they made jokes over cups full of punch. He could watch his friends fool around with Star Wars jokes and see Lucas stumble over words he tried to share with Max.

He looked over to his Walkie, sitting on his desk. He got out from his covers; picking it up quickly before heading back to his bed. He fiddled with the channels, getting it to channel eleven and listening to the white noise for a few seconds. He thought about what he wanted to say, about what he wanted her to hear. Did he tell her that she looked beautiful again, or was that too much? Did he say anything about the kiss they shared, or is that still a silent subject between them?

"I'm staring on day zero," he said into the receiver. He took his finger off the button and the white noise began to play again. He got a little more comfy into his bed, pulling the covers over his legs. "It's getting so cold outside." He began again. "I heard my mom say something about it freezing over in the next few days." He let go of the button, listening. "I like when it freezes. I like to walk on the grass because the sound of it crunching under my shoes is so cool." He thought about the last time it froze; how they had kept a bucket of water outside and it had become ice. "Sometimes we like to go to the quarry, the water there freezes over, and on special occasions you can walk on the ice." The first time they had done it Dustin almost fell through and they never went on the ice again, at least not as far out as they had gone that first day. "Maybe I can sneak you out one of these days. We can see all the icicles, go ice skating. I'm sure Max would be good at it. She could show you how it's done." He let the white noise play. "Goodnight El," he said moments later, slowly turning the walkie off and falling back onto his pillows. He put the walking beside his head and went to sleep.

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She didn't want to take the dress off. She had never been in anything as pretty as this dress and she wasn't ready for it to end, but as she looked at her bed she knew it was time. Her eyes were beginning to

droop, and the thought of laying her head on her pillow made her more tired. She found a night gown in the drawer, slipping the white material on over her body. The sleeves were long, making her feel cozy.

She took the two clips from her hair, looking into the small mirror in her room as she watched herself pull back curls that sprang into her face. She swept her fingers through her hair, pulling it all to one side of her head looking at how long it was getting; it almost touched her shoulders.

She walked over to her bed, turning her lamp off before getting under the covers. The darkness was cold, and as she tried to get comfy she felt an itch run through her body that she couldn't scratch. Her stomach pulled her, and she could feel eyes watching her. She looked up at her ceiling, putting her hand to her hair as she rubbed her head. She only closed her eyes for a moment.

"You need to calm down," El looked all around her. The void seemed darker for some reason, a little colder than it usually was. "Just breathe in and out." She looked around her for the voice, finally her eyes landing on two figures a short distance away. One body hunched over the other; Kali. She could recognize her hair anywhere. She began to walk closer with curiosity. "Please, just calm your temper." El's eyes landed on the person Kali was talking to. The girl, sitting on her butt wearing different cloths than her usual hospital gown.

"I can't breathe," the girl said hyperventilating. "It was tall," she said through breaths, "It had no face." El bent down beside them, looking into the girl's face. She wore a red beanie over her bald head. She had on a black jacket with tight fitted jeans; her frame looked so tiny in the clothes. "I know she's here," she said. "This darkness, it feels so much closer than it did before."

"You just need to calm yourself." Kali said to her. "We can't have you losing control of your emotions, it can kill someone." The girl nodded her head in understanding.

"They sedated me," the girl said. "They would always sedate me."

"Well that's not going to happen anymore," Kali finally put her hand on

the girls shoulder; El felt the need to do the same. As she lifter her hand they began to disappear, their smoke fading into nothingness.

"I'm starting on day zero," El lifted her head, looking for Mike in the Void. She found him sitting on his bed, radio in hand. She slowly walked to him, looking behind her to make sure the girls weren't still there. "It's getting cold outside." She felt like her mind was getting clouded. Her feet were cold, and she could feel her stomach slightly cramping up. "I heard my mom say something about it freezing over in the next few days." She felt a shadow over her shoulder, but she didn't want to look; she didn't want to know. "I like when it freezes," she heard the water move as she kept her eyes on Mike. "I like to walk on the grass because the sound of it crunching under my shoes is cool."

The darkness felt closer than before, and as she stood in front of Mike, she could feel a chill run down her back. A soft growl sang behind her, but she didn't look. "Sometimes we like to go to the quarry," it was there, over her shoulder. Before she could turn to look, she felt it saliva fall onto her shoulder. "The water there freezes over," Mike's voice echoed, as she willed herself to look over her shoulder. The monster standing tall; its face slightly open. She took in a sharp breath as Mike and his bed began to disappear. She slowly back into his cloud, watching as the Demogorgon walked with her, growling. Before she could do anything, it screamed, jumping at her body with its claws out.

El sat up straight, taking in a deep cold breath. She could feel her nose bleeding, but she also felt something drip from her chest. She looked down, she was still in her bed, he legs under the covers; her hands covered in blood. The top of her dressing gown was ripped, blood coming from a gash at the top of her chest.

She heard breathing coming from her left, she jumped out of fear, seeing someone standing in the darkness of her room. She pulled them with her mind, throwing them to the ground. A boys groan emitted into the silence of the room, she squinted her eyes to get a better look at who she threw on the floor. Will, in his pajamas ruffling his head with tired eyes. El quickly stood from her place in the bed, rushing to Wills side on the floor.

"What," he began to say.

"How did you get here?" Will looked at her with confusion, looking around his surroundings.

"Where am I?" He asked gulping down his fear.

"You're at the cabin," EL said. She stood from her spot next to him, walking out her bedroom door to get to Hopper. She felt the chill of outside hit her, the wood in the fire place was still burning; Hopper sleeping right next to it. The front door was wide open.

She rushed over to Hopper, the gash in her chest giving her pain but she tried to ignore it. She could hear Will behind her begin to stand up, Hopper moaned in frustration.

"Kid," he said in a sleepy tone, "It's just a bad dream."

"This isn't a dream," she said. His eyes opened quickly, he sat up looking around him. He put his hand up to the blood torn fabric on her night gown then over to the open front door. "Will's here," she said moving sideways to show Will still standing in her room in confusion. Hopper stood from the bed, heading to the front door and closing it. He walked into the room with Will, touching his shoulder causing Will to jump in panic.

"What the hell is going on?" Hopper asked looking from Will to her. "What happened to your chest?" She looked down at the gash; she could still feel blood run down her stomach. She could feel her heart race as she thought about the Demogorgon attacking her.

"I need to get home," Will said moving from the room. He began to shake slightly; either in fear or cold. "My mom's going to flip," he said with a voice crack.

"I'll get you home," Hopper said. "El, put on some cloths, I'm not leaving you here." He went into the kitchen, getting a clean dish towel and throwing it at her. "Use that for the blood." She nodded her head, moving quickly into her room, going through her cloths as she wiped the blood from her stinging chest.

7. Chapter 7

Will hid his damp hands in his sleeves as he watched Hopper put out their fire. He felt a cold in his core, but sweat was building on top of his skin; making him nauseas. The last thing he could remember was his room, the dark lingering over him as he forced his eyes shut to ignore the nagging voices in his head. He had felt like he needed to be somewhere doing something, but he didn't know what.

He knew he should have been concerned about the sleep walking, but he had never gone as far as his front door. His mother had found him a few times; standing in the hall way for who knows how long. His brother had found him in the living room, sitting with the T.V. on white noise countless times. He always thought it had something to do with the PTSD all the lab doctors told him he had.

The room dimmed as the fire steamed from the small bucket of water Hopper was slowly pouring on top of it. He could hear El in her room, moving as the floor boards creaked under her feet. He felt as if his palms were dripping. He looked down at his balled up sleeve, hiding his small hands; blotches of red showing on the fabric.

Was that blood?

His heart began to pick up speed sending waves of energy through his veins. He pulled his sleeves up, his arms slowly shaking. His fingers showed blood, most of it coming off of his shirt as he pulled it up his arm.

"Kid!" Hoppers voice made Will jump as he began to beat on El's door. Will threw his hands behind his back, looking over to Hopper who put his ear against the door. El's footsteps had become quiet. "El?" There was a small shuffle on the other side of the door, Will drew closer as he rubbed his hands on the back of his dark blue pajama pants. Hopper looked over to Will than back at the door as it slowly opened.

Will could still feel his heart in his chest as the girl slowly peeked out of the door. She wore a tank top the gash in her chest still bleeding; cut deep and sharp. He looked back down at his hands slowly as she

looked at him and then to Hopper. She pulled her body away from the door, throwing the dish towel back over her cut, revealing a steak knife in her other hand; blood on the blade. She showed it to Hopper who slowly looked down at the bloodied knife and then back up at her. Will could see it all happen in slow motion as he debated on what to do. He was as far away from the front door as he could be, Hopper in the way of him getting to it. There was no escape; he had done this. But why?

"Will?" Hopper said in a deep voice. He knew his eyes were bulging out of his head, in all honesty he knew he deserved to be punished, but he knew that this wasn't him; he didn't do this.

"I swear," Will said with a shaky voice. "I don't know what's happening. I don't know how I got here."

"I don't want to do this," Hopper said walking over to his belt that hung from the hat hook by the front door. He pulled out metal hand cuffs, looking over to Will with sad eyes. "Just trust me that I won't hurt you." Will felt fear pulse through him. He wasn't a bad kid. Sure sometimes he didn't eat all the vegetables that his mom wanted him to, and yes he did cheat on his history test, but that was just once.

"Please," he said in a sad voice. "I told my mom I would never get arrested." He felt hot tears fall from his eyes. What was happening to him? Why couldn't all of this go away?

"You're not arrested buddy," Hopper said slowly walking over to him, "but until I know you won't turn and randomly hurt her; I would feel much better if you just sat in these cuffs until I got you home." Will looked back down at his hands as Hopper slowly made his way to him. El watched from her doorway, one hand on the dish towel, the other on his knife.

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She had never had pain like this cut. It really didn't hurt that bad, just stung every time she moved the cloth around it. It wouldn't stop bleeding, and she had never seen blood come from her other than her nose, her ears, and maybe her eyes. She thought the head aches she would get after doing something that involved too much energy gave

her worse pain than this cut, but when she moved the rag to look down at it; she realized that it was going to take a while to heal.

She could hear faint sniffles from the back seat as they drove. At first she didn't know if she should feel anger, fear, or sympathy for Will. She didn't know if he was aware of the darkness the loomed over him. By the end of tonight she knew he would have some sort of idea what was still lingering in him. For the past few weeks she had ignored the signs. The feeling of something wanting to bust out of him every time she drew near. She could now understand that even though the mind flare flew out of him, it still lingered in the roots of his being.

"Has it stopped?" Hopper asked as he sped down the road.

"No," she said placing the rag back over the wound. She had found the old tank top at the bottom of her dresser drawer, it was big on her and she knew it probably belong to Hopper. The white color was slowly becoming more of a red as she bleed all over it. She was beginning to get really cold; she had forgotten her coat as they left in a hurry. The blood loss wasn't making her feel any warmer.

"You might need stitches," Hopper grumbled as he turned down the long drive to the Byers house. He honked his horn as they drew closer to the house, trying to wake Joyce before they got out of the car. He put them in park as the watched the living room lights come on; Hopper looked back at Will. "I'm sorry I had to put you in cuffs," He said to Will. El looked back at him, Will gaze falling on his mother as she came out of the front door.

El jumped out of the front seat, while Hopper struggled to get Will from the back; undoing his cuffs when he finally got him outside.

"Will?" Joyce said loudly, running from her spot on the porch. "Why is he in hand cuffs?" She threw her hands over her mouth as she began to panic. El watched as Joyce pushed Hopper aside, bringing Will into her arms. She could she Will crying over his moms shoulder, and El felt sadness cover her heart.

"Let's go inside," Hopper said, trying to lead the two to the front door. El closed her car door with a slam, pressing harder onto her chest

with the cloth, hugging herself to keep warm. Jonathan appeared by the front door, his hair strewn with confusion all over his face. El slowly made her way up the front steps behind everyone, listening to Hopper try to explain to the Byers what had happened. El stopped at the front door, listening to the rustling of something far off in the trees. She looked off to her left at the forest that surrounded the house, feeling eyes watching her. Her stomach tugged, making her move towards the noise, but before she could get any real distance away from the door, Hopper placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Get in before you get frostbite," He said pulling her out of her gaze. He pulled her through the door, the warmth of the house engulfing her as Hopper slammed the door shut behind her. She looked at Will sitting on the couch with his mother as Jonathan loomed over them. "Let's take a look at this cut," Hopper said pointing towards the kitchen. Will looked up at her, his eyes dark with exhaustion.

"I didn't mean it," he said looking at her. "I didn't know what I was doing." She looked at him, not knowing what to say. She nodded her head as if understanding while walking with Hopper to the kitchen.

He had her take a seat on top of the counter while he rummaged around the kitchen looking for paper towels. He let the facet run hot, disappearing into the bathroom and coming back out with a hand full of supplies.

"This is going to hurt kid," he said putting down a brown bottle of something she had never seen before, some bandages, and soap beside her. "I'm going to try and get some water into that cut, see how deep it is, then get some peroxide in there to clean it up." He took her hand away from the cloth, pulling it away from her gash. The blood wasn't flowing as much as it had been. Hopper took the cloth and ran it under than water, pink flowing down the drain.

They sat in silence as Hopper wet the cloth several times, applying it back to the cut and cleaning the blood from her skin. To her surprise it did hurt, but she didn't want him to see her in pain. She tried to think about other things while he grumbled under his breath; trying to be as gentle as he could.

"How bad is it," Joyce came into the kitchen, hugging herself as she

walked closer. She looked up at El with sad eyes, guilt falling all over her face.

"It could be worse," Hopper said. "I don't think you'll need stitches kid," he looked up at her with a smile. "You might have a nasty scare if it doesn't heal right though." El nodded her head, even though she didn't really understand what stitches were. Hopper put the cloth down opening the brown bottle and pouring the clear liquid onto a paper towel. "This is going to hurt," he said looking into her eyes. He grabbed her shoulder placing the paper towel over her chest and pressing down. The liquid seeped into her cut, bringing a sting she had never felt in her life. She let out a hiss as it began to bubble under the towel. "This is killing the germs," he told her, "so it doesn't get infected."

Joyce helped with the bandage, making sure it was big enough to fit across her chest. She looked down at the tapped cotton finally feeling like she didn't have blood oozing out of her. Joyce went to get her a new shirt, while Hopper helped her down from the counter looking out the kitchen window. He stared out at the trees, squinting his eyes in order to see through the darkness. El turned and looked with him, she felt a wave of cold wash through her and she began to shiver.

"Is everything okay," Joyce said, coming in with a blue long sleeve shirt. She handed it to El, both her and Hopper looked away from the window.

"I thought I saw something," Hopper said. "I think I'm just tired, or paranoid, maybe both." He shrugged his shoulders. "Why don't you go change in the bathroom and then we'll get out of here," he said looking down at her. She slowly walked down the hall, going into the bathroom and shutting the door. She looked down at the lock on the doorknob, finally clicking it to secure the door.

Her shirt was slightly sticky; she threw it into the sink and turned on the water. Joyce's long sleeve was only slightly larger than her, hugging her in all the right places to make her feel warm. It smelt of laundry detergent, making her smell the fabric with a small smile. She rinsed the shirt in the sink, ringing it out before turning the water to her face. She slashed herself with semi cold water. She looked at herself in the mirror, taking in the fact that she looked

older than she remembered, her hair slightly long than she thought it was. She actually was looking like a girl.

She heard a click on the bathroom window, as if the lock had undid itself. She could feel herself wanting to move towards it, like a magnet forcing her to move, but she tried to remain in her spot. She was trying to memorize her face. She didn't know what it was, but the feeling kept appearing to her for the past few hours. She had a need to run, to what she didn't know. She just felt as if she needed to leave, and whatever she was running to was going to bring some understanding to herself.

"You almost done in there," Hoppers voice pulled her out of her thoughts, her eyes facing the window and not the mirror. She turned from the sink, moving to the door in slow motion, stopping as if she heard something behind her. She felt a hard tug, forcing her to want to move to the window, so she followed it. "Come on kid," Hopper said again, "we need to go and get some sleep." She made it to the window. Undoing the lock, letting the cold air in. She peered out into the trees; the night was quiet and cold. Snow was starting to fall from the sky.

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Hopper didn't know what was going on. He was totally done with trying to figure things out and really just wanted to lie down for just a few hours. Days were starting to merge together, and for the past two weeks it had been nice not having to worry about anything strange happening. Tonight was weird, worrying, and to be honest terrifying. He couldn't focus on the issue until he got a few hours of sleep.

Joyce had offered them her bed, but Hopper didn't feel right having El and Will in the same house. El had been acting strange lately; she was sleep walking and seeing things in the void. Now Will was doing the same, but harming her while he was at it.

Hopper sat at the bathroom door listening to what was happening inside. There was a silence that was making the hairs on his arms stand up. "Hey kid," he said again. He had been waiting for at least a minute for her to open the door, but nothing had happened. "I'm

going to bust down this door if you don't open up," the warning rang in the silence for half a second. Joyce appeared at the end of the hall, they both looked at one another. Hopper felt a chill run from under the door, he put his hand on the door knob and twisted it; it was locked. Panic slightly ran through his blood as he slammed his body onto the door, making Joyce jump and walk over to him. He hit the door again, a third time; finally opening to an empty room. The window was wide open snow falling onto the window pain.

"Shit," Hopper said under his breath. Joyce put her hands to her mouth, looking around the bathroom to see if she could find her.

"Where is she," Joyce said as Hopper looked out the window. He could feel his stomach churning as he thought about staring out the kitchen window just moments before. He thought he saw someone in the trees, but the figure was gone as soon as he did a double take. Hopper stormed out, paying no attention to Joyce following behind him. "Why would she leave?" Joyce continued as they walked down the hall. "She doesn't have a coat; it's snowing. What's going on? Does she do this often?" Joyce's voice was becoming annoying.

They came into the living room as he went for the front door to his truck to find a flash light. "Does she feel like we can't protect her anymore? Will didn't mean to hurt her."

"Joyce," Hopper turned to her, his voice rising. "I need you to be quiet." He went through his tool box, finding his large flash light and slamming his tail gate shut. "I need Jonathan to come with me, you stay here with Will." Joyce nodded her head as they walked back into the house. "I saw someone out there," Hopper continued. He looked down at Joyce, her face contorted in panic. "I thought I was just seeing things, but I thought I saw someone in the trees. A girl." Hopper walked down the hall, pulling the gun from his belt. He walked into Wills room where Jonathan sat on Wills bed, reading him *The Hobbit*.

They both looked up at him with confusion.

"What's going on?" Jonathan asked, placing the book on the bed, sitting up a little straighter.

"El's not here," Hopper said. "Can you come with me to look?" Jonathan nodded his head.

"Where did she go," Will's small voice drew through Hoppers ears. "Is she going to be okay?" Hopper looked down at the small boy, feeling a mixture of frustration and sadness towards the kid. He was angry at him for hurting El, but at the same time felt bad for that anger.

He tried to the door, leaving Will with an unanswered question because he didn't know how to answer it honestly.

"Do you still have that gun?" Jonathan nodded his head, heading into the living room and crouching in front of the couch; grabbing a hold of the gun and pulling it out. "We are going into the tree, watch your back. I don't know what we are walking into. It could be people from the lab, or something else," Joyce joined them, tears forming in her eyes.

"Please be careful," she said; putting her hands to Jonathans face before letting them rush out the back door. A cold sweat rush past Hopper face, but all he could feel was determination.

"Red alert! Red alert!" Mike felt like he was being raised from the dead. His head was warm and heavy on his pillow; he could almost feel the chill coming from his closed window. "Is anyone there?" Will's voice was panicked making Mike sit straight up. He pulled the covers from his body, grabbing the walkie from his desk.

"Can't this wait until morning?" Lucas's voice wined. Mike sat with the device in his hand, waiting for Will to say something back. "Over?" Lucas added after a few seconds of silence.

"I," Will voice came in funny. "Then-she-I don't" Will's house was too far for Mike to pick it all up. He moved around his room with the walkie talkie held high in the air to get a better connection. "Now she's gone." Will ended. He assumed it was his mom, and Mike felt panic course through him. What happened to his mom, did his dad come back and do something? Was it men from the lab?

"What do you mean she's gone?" Lucas said. "And what do you mean you cut her? Over!"

"What is happening," Mike said to himself as he threw the walkie talkie onto the bed and ran for his closet. He took a sweater from its hanger, throwing it over his long sleeved shirt. He went through his dirty pile of jeans, pulling out the ones he wore yesterday because they were good with the cold.

"Mike!" Lucas voice yelled. "Mike! Wake up!" he rolled his eyes, grabbing the walkie from the bed as he tripped over his long legs; his pants half on.

"What's happening, over," he said throwing the walkie back onto the bed while pulling his pants up.

"El's missing!" Lucas said loudly. "I repeat El is missing, this is a red alert. Get to Wills! Over and out!"

"What," he said out loud, grabbing some socks throwing them on while pulling things into his back pack as fast as he could. He had been with her, just a few hours before at the dance. How could she be missing?

He ran out of his bed room door; backpack in one hand, shoes in the other, running to Nancy's door as quietly as he could. He entered without Knocking, throwing his backpack on her bed waking her up. "Wake up!" he said in a loud whisper. Nancy sat up fast looking at a frazzled Mike as he slipped his shoes on. "We have to go, El is missing." Without a word Nancy flew out of bed, running to her closet and putting jeans on over her night dress. Mike turned around as she changed.

"What happened?" Nancy said. Mike went through multiple scenarios in his head. They saw her at the dance, they followed them home, and they got her in her sleep. The bad men, they have been watching, they were always watching. Mike could feel the panic pour from his eyes.

"I don't know," he said trying not to cry. "I just know she's missing." Nancy put her hand on his shoulder, he turned around. She wore a jean jacket, shoes already on her feet.

"Let's go," she said moving to her window so they could sneak out.

Hopper was panicking now, he was really panicking and he didn't know what to do. He started running through the trees, flashlight in one hand, and his gun in the other. The snow was falling with peace, as if nothing chaotic was going on. He could feel the panic in his chest as he tried to bring in air, but couldn't. Jonathan followed close behind, his breath coming out in clouds as he tried to catch his breath. They had been walking for thirty minutes with no sign or sound from anyone.

"This can't be happening," Hopper said out loud. "How is this happening?" He stopped in his tracks looking all around him as if the lack of movement would help him see through the dark trees.

"Do you think she went a different way? Maybe she was just scared of what happened with Will and ran home." Jonathon rested the long gun on his shoulder, shining his flashlight through the dark woods.

"She's not stupid," Hopper said. "She wouldn't leave without telling me." He didn't know what to do; he didn't know where to go. All he could think about was the fact that he was her dad for just a few days and he already messed it up.

"I think we need to head back," Jonathan said. Hopper looked at him with anger in his eyes. "The snow is falling faster, we haven't seen or heard anything since we stepped foot in here." Hopper turned to look back, searching as hard as he could through the darkness. The snow was getting deeper, the air was slightly colder. "We haven't even seen tracks in the snow," Jonathon continued. "We need to go back and gather our thoughts. Like you said, she's not stupid." Hopper bowed his head in frustration.

"Yeah," He replied turning around. Jonathan led the way as they slowly walked their way back. Every once and a while Hopper would take a glance back at the chance that maybe she was following behind. They walked through the cold, Hopper finally realizing he was shaking as the snow covered the shoulders of his police jacket.

"I'm sure she's fine," Jonathan said. "She was able to survive a while on her own out here. Maybe something spooked her and that's why she ran."

"That's not how El is," Hopper said. "There's something going on. There's something going on with Will, and there is something going on with her." They continued to walk in silence, finding their way back to the house where every light was on through the windows. Hopper followed Jonathan up the back steps, voices playing in his ears as Jonathan opened the back door.

"What do you mean?" Mike's voice boomed from the living room. Hopper let out an angry groan as he slammed the back door shut. Why was Wheeler here? He looked down at his watch, 3:00 A.M.

"I'm sorry," Hopper let his angry voice haler form the kitchen. He walked quickly into the living room; all four boys looking up at him. "Why the hell are you guys here?" He yelled. "Do you know what time it is? Do your parents know where you are?"

"Where is she?" Mike said as if Hopper didn't say anything. "What happened?" Hopper could feel himself deflate in front of them as he looked for Joyce around the room. Out the front window he saw a lit cigarette. He looked at all four boys, not knowing what to say.

"This is all my fault," Will said. Tears fell from his eyes as he pulled the blanket over his shoulders. Dustin put his hand on Will's back for comfort, looking up to Hopper for words that he couldn't begin to think of.

"I need a second," Hopper said. He placed the flash light on the couch, putting his gun back on his hip and he went out on the front porch.

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El forgot to wear socks and she's so mad at herself for that. The air around her was getting colder and the snow was getting deeper. All she knew was that she had to keep walking, but she didn't know what she was walking for. The pull was getting stronger, it was making her head hurt a little bit and she hated that it was snowing. She hated winter time.

She stopped to look behind her, seeing nothing but her foot steps from where she had been. Ever since she left if felt as if someone was

watching her, but every time she looked around she couldn't find anyone. Everything was quiet, making her feel creeped out.

She knew she was taking the long way to Mirkwood. She had circled around the house slowly when she had jumped out the window, walking through the side trees by where Hopper had parked. She had heard boys shouting earlier, but now as she walked all she heard was the snow falling and her cold breaths as she stepped through the forest.

She stood in front of the gate; looking up at the tall chain linked fence. This was the last place she wanted to be, but at the same time she was so curious. She glanced around her for a second. There was nothing to see but the same trees that had always stood there. The tug in her stomach was lessening, the slow pounding in her head becoming quite. She had never climbed a fence before, but she had seen boys do it on the T.V. so she supposed it couldn't be that hard. It was coming to the top; pointed wires like springs stabbing at her, she knew getting over was going to hurt. She could feel her cut opening back up as she made her way over and down; jumping off the last few feet.

As she drew closer through the trees, she could smell the charred building. It had been a few weeks since the fire, yet it still felt like she had seen the flames just yesterday. The building wasn't as tall as it used to be. Some of the levels had caved in, while the lower half was still in tact. She walked through the empty parking lot, snow gracing the ground with beauty. Her room had been on the lower levels, she knew she would be able to find it if she went in.

She followed the road to the lower front doors, a sign was placed over the doors, *Caution Danger* placed in big red letters over the plastered sign. She looked at a way in, and the windows of the doors were busted out. She got on her knees, crawling under the sign and into the building.

Everything was dark, but as her eyes adjusted she was able to find her way. Water on the floors was becoming slippery from the cold; turning to ice as the night went on. The walls were blackened by the smoke, and El could see familiar doorways and halls come into her view.

She thought back to the time she had the chicken pocks. She had lain in her bed until it made her body ache; Papa came in and read her stories while she got better. He had given her a toy than; a stuffed animal. That was the only time that she could remember where she actually thought her life was okay.

She looked through a door way, into a small room; too dark to see into. She realized where she was, looking around her surrounding with a heavy heart. Why did she come here? She had a feeling in her heart, he feeling in her gut. She was forced here, like she was told she had to come.

She heard something fall in the distance, like a heavy metal object falling onto the floor. It echoed throughout the entire building, making El's heart race. The noise was followed by silence, a silence that wasn't there before. She could feel it, like something was there, or someone. She thought of all the places she could go, all the rooms she could hide in, but her mind went to one place; the copper room. It was tucked away in a corner, where no one would think to look. It was lower down, under where she stood. She took a few steps down the hall, trying to be as quiet as possible, but as she heard a heavy foot fall behind her she knew she had to move faster.

She took the stairs, running on the lower level. The floor had less water, there was less fire damage, but black still covered the walls. She moved down the long hall way, coming to the small corner and peering into the small room. It was darker than she remembered it, colder than she thought it would be. She hesitantly took a step in putting her hand on the heavy door to close it slightly. She put her back against the side of the copper wall. Foot falls echoed, making it sound like they could be coming from anywhere. She took in deep breaths to calm her panicked heart.

"The kids are stressing me out," Joyce said as Hopper joined her on the patio. "Did you find anything?" Hopper shook his head, looking out into the front yard, trying to find anything that could help him understand.

"No foot prints, no anything," Joyce threw her cigarette walking over to him and looking out at what he could see. They stared in different directions of the yard, listening to the snow, and the silence.

"He's been sleep walking," Joyce said looking up at Hopper. "I didn't say anything about it because I didn't think it was that big of a deal after everything that happened." She put her hands to her face. "What am I supposed to do? I mean who do I go to about this? What kind of doctor do I look up for PTSD from possession from another dimensional being?" Hopper shook his head.

"We knew something was up," Hopper said. "I even told you it wasn't over." He let the silence play for a moment as he thought of El, lying in the forest screaming. "She was having dreams, she wasn't sleeping, Will was sleep walking. I mean, it was all in front of us but we didn't even push them to tell us what they thought was happening. All I did was tell her to stop going into the void." Hopper let out a frustrated breath. "She has my name for two days and I can't even keep her safe."

"Hey," Joyce said. "You have been a great father figure to her. I know it, and she knows it. This is something we don't have a handle on, because this is something that we weren't prepared for." Hopper shook his head at her words. The sound of a car played in their ears as head light came around the bend. A Hawkins Energy van parked behind Hopper truck.

"Oh shit," Hopper said under his breath as he flew through the front door, Joyce on his heels. "Take Will to his room," Hopper said to the boys. He grabbed his gun from his belt.

"What going on?" Mike asked, while Lucas and Dustin pulled Will out of the room.

"You stay in that room until me or Joyce tell you it's safe." Hopper said, looking to the boys eyes. "Make sure Jonathan is with you, make sure he has the gun." Mike gulped slowly, "Go!" Hopper yelled. The boy turned in his spot, running down the hall. Joyce looked out the front window; Hopper listened as her breaths came in uneven.

"Why are they here?" She asked him before their front door barged open. Men filled in with their large guns, pointing at Hopper and Joyce. They yelled for him to put his gun down, Hopper slowly put the gun on the floor before putting his hands up. At most ten men; all crowding them in the small living room. Hopper looked over to

Joyce, her face fell with anger.

"Get out of my house," She yelled. The men drew in closing, making Hopper grab Joyce and threw her behind him. He put his hands in front of them, trying to signal for them to stop.

"Well well," a voice rang from the open front door. The men stood their ground, guns pointed, eye glaring. Brenner came into the circle, Hoppers stomach dropping as they made eye contact. "I knew she was here, but I tried to give you the benefit of the doubt."

"You're alive," Hopper said slowly.

"Where is she?" Hopper looked around the room, trying to think.

"Not here," Hopper said. "I guess she knew you were coming, ran for the hills about an hour ago." Brenner's face fell, the smirk on his lips disappearing. He pointed at three men from his left, showing them the door. They left, guns and all; going to look for her.

"Here's what's going to happen." Brenner started. "We are searching this house top to bottom. Everyone is getting questioned," He points at Hopper, "and you are coming with me." Hopper let a laugh build in his chest.

"I'm not going anywhere with you, you son of a bitch."

"Yes well," Brenner step a little bit closer, "This is now a government investigation. You were hiding a fugitive, this is what's happens when you disobey the law."

"She's a child," Joyce said behind Hopper. "She's just a child." The room fell silent. Brenner took in a deep breath.

"Search the house," he announced. "Check every nook and cranny. The men spread out, some down the hall, others nocking things over and going through personal items close by."

"Hey," Joyce said loudly. Hopper turned and put his hands on her shoulders to calm her down. The kids yelling down the hall rang through his ears. Mikes voice yelling over all of them.

"Don't touch me!" Hopper could hear him yell. Each kid was dragged into the living room. Nancy grabbing Mike by the collar to draw him closer to her, Jonathan doing the same to Will. Joyce ran to them, tears in her eyes as men tore apart her house. Hopper put his hands to his head, trying his hardest not to think of El; of where she could have gone. One of the guards came into the room, holding a wet bloodied shirt. He showed it to Brenner, who pulled a zip lock from his back pocket.

"We had a break in two weeks ago," Brenner began to say, looking down the line of kids and then finally at Hopper. "One of my patients was taken; kidnapped. We tracked the car to this town; they've been here for a few days." Hopper listened to his words, trying to understand what he meant. Patient?

"You mean one of your experiments was taken?" Hopper said with anger. "Well we didn't do it if that's what you're suggesting."

"Yes well," he drew a little closer to Hopper with a smile. "I know who did it. I'm just trying to figure out why they came here, and the only thing I can think of is that there is something here they need; maybe want." Hopper's mind went to the girl, the one he thought he saw before. El had been having dreams of a girl, dreams of darkness.

"Well I wonder what it is then." Hopper said. "Whatever it is you won't find it here." The room fell silent as they listened to the guards move from room to room; each expression on their faces in anger.

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She didn't know how she was becoming so calm. One minute the sounds of footsteps was causing her heart to burst, the next she was taking deep calming breaths; her body moving down the wall as she sat on the cold floor hugging her legs. They were getting closer, whoever it was, but all El could think about was how much she wanted to be asleep in her own bed. How she would love for Hopper to wrap her up in a blanket by the fire as they watched more Christmas movies all night. She smiled at the thought; at the feeling of comfort. The feeling remained until she felt a hand on her shoulder, drawing her out of her daze, sending in a wave of realization.

A girl, her red beanie tucked over her ears, eyes wide, a jacket a size too big. El looked into her eyes, ready to send a wave of energy towards her, realizing this was the girl; the one she had been seeing. She was here, crouched in front of her, her hands on her shoulder.

"I just want to help," the girl said quietly. "We've been looking for you." El didn't know what to say, only knowing that the feeling inside of her, the tugging, was starting to make more sense. "I'm sorry," the girl continued. "I used my power to make you come here. To make you feel like you needed to be here. I just made you want to go home." Home? This wasn't her home. This was a burnt down building that gave her nightmares.

El took the girl's hand from her shoulder, standing fast looking past her to see shadows coming from the hallway. The girl stood and looked into the hallway with her. El stomped past her, knowing who she was going to find on the other side of the door; Kali and her friends. Kali stood straight from the wall as El came out. El looked into her eyes, not sure what to feel.

"We need to go," Kali said. "I'm sure Brenner has people following us. We've stayed in one place for far too long." Brenner, the name rang in El's ears. Brenner, Papa. They should leave? She couldn't go; her friends were here, her family.

"I'm not leaving," El said. "I'm not leaving my friends." She walked past the group in the hallway.

"You don't understand Jane," Kali said. "Brenner is looking for you. He has his eyes set on getting you back, and whatever he wants he gets." El didn't look back, she kept walking. She felt herself feel guilty. She felt bad for walking away, she felt sad for not being able to understand. She thought back to Brenner. How he read to her was she was sick, and instead of feeling peace from the moment she felt anger. Her emotions bounced in her mind as she continued to walk; anger, guilt, sadness. She stopped in mid stride, Kali running into her. El turned to look back at everyone, the girl was in the back of the group, and her nose was bleeding.

"Leave me alone," El yelled at her.

"Please," the girl said whipping her nose. "Just let us explain. We came for you, we came to help." El looked at everyone; they looked tired, a little cold. She thought about her options, about what her next step should be.

"Can we talk somewhere else," El said. She looked to Kali, a small smile played on her face.

"Lead the way," Kali said. She needed to get out side. She need somewhere more open, so if she needed to run, she could.

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They had stopped looking through Wills house ten minutes ago. They took the Byers into one room, the boys and Nancy sat in the living room, while Hopper was taken out of the house, men pointing their guns at him while they zip tied his hands behind his back. Nancy had been holding Mikes arm the entire time, never letting him go.

"This is crazy," Lucas said. "It's a good thing we didn't stop by Max's." Lucas had wanted to grab Max on the way, Mike had protested, wanting to get to El as fast as he could. They had already wasted time on getting Dustin out of bed. "Where do you think she went?" He asked, the rest of them remained silent. "She couldn't have gone far with this snow."

"I don't think we should be talking about this right now," Mike said. Nancy nodded her head next to him while Dustin stole a glance out the window.

"Should we talk about how they are arresting the chief of police," Dustin said. "How are we getting out of this one?" Mike thought about the question. Maybe if they caused a distraction, Hopper could get away; go find El.

"Stop sceaming," Nancy said looking into his face. "We aren't getting out of this; we are just going to shut up with our heads down."

"I thought you took these people out," Lucas said. "I thought you exposed them, how are they still here?"

"I don't know," Nancy said. "If they work for the government,

exposing them will only do so much. It drew them out of the town, not out of the world." The room fell back into silence as they heard Mrs. Byers yell from the other room.

"Do you think they'll take him," Dustin said. "Do you think they'll take Will?"

"They can't," Mike said. Or can they? "I mean, he's just a kid. That would be kidnapping."

"So!" Dustin said back. "Look what they did to El, you think they cared if she was a kid or not?" Mike heard footsteps come down the hall, Brenner stepped into the room. Mike could see red as he looked into the man's face. Nancy held his arm a little tighter.

"I think we can all agree that we would like this night to be over," Brenner said in a nice voice. "All I need is a little help. Wouldn't you want to say you helped the government take down some bad people?" His voice annoyed Mike. He talked to them like they were small children. Bad people? Did this man know he was talking about himself?

"You won't get anything out of us," Mike said with poison in his voice. "We would never tell you anything, no matter what." Dustin and Lucas nodded at his words. "So go ahead and try," Mike continued. "You'll never find her."

"She couldn't have gone far," Brenner said, his eyes brows raised. "Not in this snow, isn't the right Mr. Sinclair?" Lucas raised his eyebrows looking over at Mike and Dustin. Somehow he heard them talking, he had ears all over the place. "Let's talk," he said; turning to grab a chair from the kitchen and bringing it into the middle of the living room. "Who wants to go first?" Everyone looked at one another, their mouths closed in determination.

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They hoped the chain linked fence, crossed Mirkwood, and headed back into the trees. She had only been gone for two or three hours, a little bit of that time had been taken in the burnt down lab, but the snow had fallen fast. Each step El took her foot fell a little deeper

into the cold snow. Her toes were becoming numb; the fact that she didn't have a jacket was making it worse. They walked for ten minutes in the trees, she knew she was heading back to the house.

"Let's stop here," She heard Kali say. "This is far enough." EL turned in her spot, looking at everyone circle up. Axel hugged himself, his thin leather jacket not enough for the chill. Small bits of flakes were getting caught in his hair. Dottie looked around her, looking up at the tall tree with a smile. "We are here to retrieve you, to bring you away from all of this." El shook her head; she already said she wasn't leaving.

"We also want to help," the girl said. "The darkness, it looms over this city like depression and anger combined ready to combust. I can feel it all over you, all over that boy you were with." She thought about what she meant. The boy, she must be talking about Will.

"What do you mean darkness?" El asked. She assumed it was the Demogorgon, the one that stayed in her void even when she didn't want it there.

"The creature," the girl said, "The one without a face." El looked around at everyone else; her eyes finally landing on Kali.

"We can get you away from it all," kali said. "We can form a plan to take these people down, to take Papa down." Kali's eyes bore into hers; she could feel a shiver run through her. She heard a shuffle behind her, a branch popped and they all jumped.

"Hey," a voice rang. El turned quickly, three men came into view as they rushed forward, guns held at them. She backed into the group, Axel cursing under his breath. "Everyone put your hands up!" El looked at everyone else, Micks hands raised into the air; she looked over at Kali who looked at the men with a death glare.

The man in the middle began to panic, his gun flying to the guy next to him, he yelled at his partner. "Get on the ground," he yelled pointing his gun at the man's head. El looked over at Kali, her nose starting to bleed.

"We gotta go," Axel said quickly. El thought about her options.

Should she stay with the group, should she head back to Hopper? These men, they looked like bad men. Everyone starting running for Mirkwood, El looked back at them, then ran in the opposite direction, past the men with the guns.

"Jane," she heard Kali yell.

"Come back," the girl's small voice yelled after her, but she didn't look back. If the bad men were here, that meant they could be with Hopper. He could be in trouble. She heard a gun fire, foot falls in the snow sounded from behind her, but she didn't look back.

"Jane," the girl's voice cried. She was closer behind than she thought. For a while all she could hear was her own breaths, along with the girls as she struggled to keep up. "There's still one after us," the girl said as El looked behind her. One of the men ran, his gun still in his arms, a cloud of breath shooting from his mouth.

El stopped in her tracks, getting herself ready to send the man flying. The girl stopped with her, looking at the man as he continued to run after him, his gun raised. She took in a deep breath, her energy running low from their fast running. Before she could even comprehend what she was doing, his gun fired as a tripped over the root of a tree. She heard the built land somewhere near her; she looked down at herself to make sure it wasn't her. The girl next to her flew back red falling onto the snow.

She felt cold run through her heart, as she drew in a breath of ice. The man stumbled back onto his feet, El looked at him with fire in her eyes; cracking his neck before he had time to gather himself. He fell to the ground with a loud thud.

Men yelled into the forest a small distance away. It came in the direction of the Byers house, El felt herself slowly deflate. She looked down at the girl; her right hand covered her left shoulder. Blood was spilling onto the white forest floor.

"We need to get out of here," She said to El with gridded teeth. She slowly sat up, yelling out in pain. El helped her to her feet, trying to make sure she stayed quiet in the process. Where could she go? They were at the house, the cabin was too far away, and she couldn't run

back to Kali, she would be seen before she could even reach them.

"We just need to keep walking," El said. "I need to make sure their okay," she felt her stomach sink. She felt sick, weak, like blood was being drained from her. "You need to stop that," El said. "Whatever you're doing, it's making me weaker." They began to walk slowly; El had the girl's right arm over her shoulder, helping the girl walk.

"I can't help it," the girl said. "I don't really have great control over what I can make people feel. It comes and goes. They would just sedate me in the hospital." El listened to her words. "It's done terrible things," The girl continued, her voice coming out in huff as she tried to breath. "I've made people do terrible things." They took small steps in silence; she could hear men shout in the distance, moving away from them. Maybe she could just check, look at the house from a distance to see if it was safe.

"Let's go this way," El said, heading to her left. "If it's safe I know someone who can help you. My friends," she said, adjusting the girls arm on her shoulder. "Their smart, they'll know what to do."

"My names Tory," the girl said. "I'm sure after this we'll be great friends." El rolled her eyes.

...

Gun shots, Mike could hear the faint gunshots as he sat in the living room, his mouth shut as Brenner looked at every single one of them. Brenner stood from his chair, listing for more. He went for the front door taking the front steps in one big jump, heading for the men that stood outside waiting for him. Mike stood from his spot from the couch; he looked out the front door. All the men grabbed their guns, Brenner yelling at them where to go and what to do.

"You stay with this man," Brenner said, pulling a gun from one of the vans. He pointed at Hopper who leaned with his back against his car. "Don't take your eyes off of him." The guard nodded his head, pointing his gun at Hopper as Brenner took off after the rest of his people.

Mike waiting until he couldn't see Brenner anymore before he took a

step outside; looking to the guard, and then at Hopper. Hopper side glanced at him, while Mike continued down the front steps.

"Get yourself back inside kid," the guard said, not taking his eyes off of Hopper. Mike looked at the ground, looking for a rock. He found the biggest one he could find, fitting into his palm perfectly. "I said go back inside," The guard yelled looking at Mike. That's all it took, one split second of distraction for Hopper to fly forward and head-butt the man to the ground. Mike ran to the man, pulling the gun from his hands while the man looked around in a pained confusion. Hopper walked over to the him, kicking his head just right to knock him out.

Mike looked at the gun in his hands, slowly placing it on the ground and whipping his sweaty palms on his jeans.

"Let's get me out of this," Hopper said, his hands still tied behind his back. They both rushed inside, Nancy grabbing a kitchen knife to cut the zip tie from his wrists. "Two gun shots," Hopper said. "There was one, and then a minute later there was one closer to here." Mike felt himself gulp down a breath. They both stared at one another in the light of the living room, Joyce joining them in shock. "They wouldn't shoot at El, not when they have gone so long looking for her."

"What do we do?" Mike asked him. Hopper stared at him for a moment.

"We should leave," Joyce said. Hopper looked over to her. "I have to get Will out of here. He talked about Will, about running tests. I have to get him out of here." Hopper nodded his head.

"Take your car, and take Jonathan; head for the cabin. It's off the grid, and as far as I know, they don't know about it." Joyce nodded her head, heading back into the hall way. Hopper looked at Nancy. "You think you can handle a big gun," He said to her. She looked to Mike.

"I can do it," She said.

"What about us," Dustin said from behind Hopper. "We want to help." Hopper shook his head.

"You can help by staying here," Mike rolled his eyes.

"That's not happening," Mike said in protest. "She needs us out there, looking and helping."

"Kids," Hopper said. "I don't have time to debate with you."

"This isn't up for debate!" Mike yelled back. "We are coming with you." Joyce came back into the room, Will and Jonathan following close behind.

"You guys are heading back With Will," he pulled his car keys from his pocket. "Take my truck," he handed his keys to Jonathan. He looked back at them his figure pointed at them with a stern look. "You are going with Will, and you guys are the look out until we come back with El." Mike felt his stomach drop as Hopper looked at him. "I am coming back with El," he said with sadness in his eyes. Mike nodded his head, looking to Nancy and Joyce and the boys left through the front door.

"It's going to be okay," Nancy said to him. "I'm going to be okay," Mike felt fear run through him. He nodded his head before walking out of the front door.

...

"We're almost there," El said as she dragged Tory through the snow. "It's going to be okay." Tory hadn't talked in the past few minutes. She groaned and let out a harsh breath as El dragged her at her side. She felt herself fading, Tory's energy was rubbing off on her. She could feel sickness growing inside of her, as if the blood dripping for her cut was pouring out of her body.

The trees began to thin as the small Byers house came into view. She let out a sigh of relief, stopping for just a second to take in a breath of air. Hawkins Energy vans sat in the drive way, a man on the gravel passed out. Hoppers truck was missing and she began to feel acid in her stomach reach her throat. He had left, he had left without her. She walked closer to the house, looking down at the man on the ground, blood running front the temple of his head.

"El!" She felt Tory jump at the noise. Hoppers voice sounded of anger and relief. She looked up at him, Nancy standing behind him with a big black gun. He ran over to her, she felt her legs give in as her and Tory hit the snow. Tory let out a cry of pain as El tried her best not to pass out.

"Get Joyce's key," Hopper yelled behind him. She could feel his hands on her face, but was having a hard time keeping her vision straight. Tory lay on the ground next to her, blood falling from her shoulder. "What happened," he asked her. She couldn't get words to fall out of her mouth. His hands left her face as he looked down and Tory. "Jesus," he breathed.

"Let's get out of here," Nancy said, the car keys jingling.

"You take El," Hopper said, "Ill grab the girl."

...

"Watch your step," Joyce said to the boys as she stepped over a patch of snow. "Trip wire," Mike felt his eye brows raise as he looked at Lucas and Dustin. In any other situation he would have thought that was cool, but at this moment he just took his step a little wider. The cabin looked cold, and as Joyce opened the front door he realized it was because it was.

The space was small, a small table for two in the kitchen, barley any space for couch in the living room, and a single bed sitting by the fire place. This is where she was living; cramped in this confined space with Hopper for a year. He looked around at everything, a small drawing on the fridge, and empty eggo box in the trash. He walked up to the closed door, debating if he wanted to look inside.

"This is crazy," Dustin said. Joyce fiddled with the fire place; while Will took a seat on the couch. Jonathan took one of the kitchen chairs, placing it by the front door to sit with his gun.

Mike looked back at the door, his hand on the door knob. He finally found the courage to slowly open it, adjusting his eyes to the darkness of the room. A dim light flowed in as the fire Joyce was building grew. The wall painted orange from the small flames. A bed

sat in the corner, blood covering the sheets. A book shelf, with actual books, sat against the opposite wall. He walked deeper into the room, noticing a teddy bear sitting on the bed. He picked it up; looking at it was a sad expression. 353 days, she had sat in this small cabin. 353 days and she had been so close.

"I didn't mean to do it," Will voice said from behind him. He jumped slightly at the extrusion. "I don't even know how I got here. It would be like an hour walk. I don't even know how I got inside." Mike looked back down at the bear in his hands, and then the bed. Blood sat on her sheets. He looked over to Will, guilt playing in his eyes. "I don't know why I did it." Mike thought of about it. I pictured Will standing over El with a knife, he couldn't see it happening.

"It wasn't you," Mike said. He put the bear back onto the bed. "The mind flayer," Mike continued, "it must have some kind of hold on your mind, even though it's gone." Will looked down at the floor. "We'll figure it out," or would they? Mike thought about it, about all the impossible things they had done in the past year. "We always figure it out." He grabbed a hold of Wills shoulders; looking down at his friend with hope in his eyes. "We'll find El, we'll get rid of these bad men, and we'll figure out how to take care of you." Will gave him a small smile. Mike led him back into the living room, Dustin and Lucas sat on the couch, slowly falling asleep. Joyce sat with Jonathan, the second chair pulled next to him. Now, they wait.

...

"You need to keep your eyes open," Hopper said from the back seat. El could feel a little bit of her energy come back as she sat in the passenger seat. Nancy sped down the road, heading to the cabin. "You can't fall asleep, we're almost there." Tory gave a small moan; El looked down at her hands, blood covering them.

"Her names Tory," El said. She turned to look at Hopper. His tall frame looked bigger than usual in the small back seat of Joyce's car.

"What happened?" Hopper asked her as he applied a little more pressure to Tory's shoulder.

"Long story," El said back. She felt herself slightly deflate into the

seat. Nancy looked over at her.

"We're almost there," Nancy said. She veered off the road into the trees. Slowing down on the snow covered path. "Can you walk on your own," Nancy asked her. El nodded her head, seeing Hoppers truck appear in front of them. Snow continued to fall from the sky as they got out of the car. "Do you think they'll see the tire tracks?" Nancy asked Hopper as he stepped out of the back seat. She helped him pull Tory from the back seat and into his arms.

"Hopefully the snow will cover it right up," He huffed as he took a step forward. El let him lead the way. She looked at all the foot prints in the snow as they past, almost covered up by a new pool of white. Nancy ran past them, up the steps of the cabin, a dim light played on the inside. She pushed open the door as Hopper climbed the stairs, bringing Tory inside.

"Oh my god!" she heard Joyce yell. EL took to the steps slowly, feeling the weight of the night fall on top of her. Nancy cleared the table, Hopper placed Tory on top of it.

"El?" Mike came around the couch, running to her and pulling her into a hug. The warmth of his body made her want to crumble. "I thought I lost you again," he said softly. He pulled her back to look at her. "Never leave like that again," he said firmly. She nodded her head in agreement.

"I promise," she said to him.

"Was she shot?" Lucas said, coming around the couch. Hopper turned on the facet, waiting for the warm water to start pouring.

"We need to stitch her up," Hopper said. He looked over to El. "Get towels, and the first aid kit. Find the threading needle, and some dental floss." El nodded her head. She turned from Mike, closing the door, and securing every lock before getting to work.

8. Chapter 8

El went through the cabinet in the bathroom as she listened to Tory give a yell from Hopper taking off her coat. Her hands were shaking, and the chill that stood in her blood was starting to boil. She didn't know why everyone was here, she didn't know how everyone could fit into such a small space, and with the fire going it was becoming hard to breathe. She grabbed the dental floss, looking down at the white cartridge in her bloodied hands. She let her fingers rap around it as she tried to stop her hands from shaking.

"It looks like it hit her left shoulder," she heard Dustin say from the table. She looked over to see him standing over Tory with Hopper and Joyce. "If it had hit one of the arteries we would know already, but that doesn't mean she still can't bleed out." Hopper side glanced at him with confusion.

"How do you know that?" He asked Dustin, El slowly walked over; placing the floss with the rest of the supplies on the kitchen counter. The sink still ran, steam spilling from the hot water as it poured down the drain.

"Because I pay attention in biology," Dustin said. "It's basic anatomy." El looked around the Cabin. Will sat with dark circles under his eyes, Jonathan with his arm around Will's shoulder. Mike rested himself on the arm of the couch, watching as Joyce and Hopper took the girls shirt off, Mikes cheeks flaring red. Dustin crowded over the girl, looking at her shoulder with curiosity. Lucas stood a short distance away, not knowing what to do. Nancy pulled Mikes arm from the couch, making him look over at his sister as she tried to get him to look away.

"You need to see if the bullets out first," Dustin said.

"I know," Hopper said with a grumble. "How about you move out of the way," he said in his grumpy voice. Dustin took a few steps back from the table, watching as Hopper moved to the towel on the counter, pushing El out of the way to get to the sink. "You need to get warm kid," He said to her. "Go stand by the fire for a minute." El gulped down some air. She didn't want to get warm; her blood was

already burning. Hopper wet the towel, looking over to Joyce who wore a pained expression. "Hold her down." Joyce nodded her head holding the girl by her good shoulder and stomach. Hopper pressed the wet towel down on the girl's bullet wound, sending a screech to move through the cabin.

The pain reached into El left shoulder, a pain she had never felt in her life as she began to sink to the floor with a cry. Tory became silent, the pain making her pass out. It was El that continued to shriek as Hopper pressed hard to the girls shoulder. The bullet not only sinking into Tory shoulder, but El's too. El's breath came fast as she stopped her pained cry, everyone looking at her. She couldn't take the crowd, how full the space around her felt as she felt Tory's pain build inside of her.

"What's wrong," she heard Hoppers voice scream. El couldn't see, she couldn't think, and air was too thick for her to breath. All she could see was darkness; a darkness that loomed over her back as she sat on her knees on the floor. The gash across her chest was on fire, and the noise of voices around her were dulled as she listened to her heart beat race.

"El," she heard from a distance. Her name being said on repeat as she found herself in the void; the black all around her. She listened to a girls muffled cry, echoing through the open space. Tory lay on the wet floor in the distance. El stood, running to the girl as she cried. She slid to a stop beside her, falling to her knees as she watched Tory lay on the floor, blood falling into the water.

"It's here," Tory said through gasps. "The darkness." El looked around her, trying to find anything. She couldn't hear anything, she couldn't see anything. Tory let out a muffled cry, her body beginning to dissipate in front of her. "It's looking for you," Her voice said as she disappeared. El stood from her spot on the floor, looking for anything that might move.

She spun in her spot, walking quickly through the void alone. Mikes voice echoed through her ears, her name flowing in and out as she took in heavy breaths. She couldn't get herself out, and she didn't know where Tory went. Did she wake up? Or did something else happen to her?

She heard a growl in the distance, followed by Joyce's voice saying Will's name. El looked around her, preparing herself for an attack, but couldn't find anything. Another growl sneered behind her; she spun again starting to feel disoriented. There it stood. A monster towering taller than her, and beside it Will stood, his eyes rolled to the back of his head, as he reached to touch the monster.

"No!" El screamed as she moved herself forward, reaching for Will. The Demogorgon screamed at her sending panic to cores down her body. She stopped a few feet from them, feeling her breaths move in and out at top speed. She let herself scream back in anger, watching as Will turned and looked at her through his white eyes. She felt the anger build, the fear, as she raised her hand at the demon, forcing a power to run in and out of her blood. She felt a static bounce off her skin as she watched the creature try to move towards her, but her powers holding it back. She could feel the weakness inside of her, pain coming back to her shoulder from Tory's wound. She couldn't stop her screams as the Demogorgon took a heavy step towards her, Will still standing in a catatonic state.

She let herself feel the weakness, the split in her body as the energy began to run out. Her scream was becoming weak, and she felt as if the world around her was shaking. The monster took another step, as she watched them slowly disappear. Will let a slight smile spilt across his face, the world around her going dark as she let her arm fall to her side.

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The ground was shaking, but for Mike it was nothing compared to the loud streaking that was being emitted from El. The sound was deafening, and the worst part was it made everyone stop in their motions; making it hard for Mike to take care of her. He watched as the lights grew brighter, her screams getting louder, and the floorboards moved from their place. He knew what was happening, and even though he promised her he would stop it from happening, he had no control.

Hopper leaned over the new girl as El's screams became slightly softer. Hopper placed his hand over her shoulder as Mike crawled his way to El who remained on the floor in the kitchen. His ears were

ringing and the floor still slightly rumbling. Dustin moved his way to Hopper, his voice soft as he tried to assist in any way that he could. As the ringing started to die down from Mike's ears he could hear faint whimpers from Mrs. Byers as she leaned over Will in the living room.

"I have skinny metal tongs in the right drawer by the sink," Hopper said to Dustin. "We can use those to get the bullet out." Dustin nodded his head as Mike looked down at El, her breaths coming in and out fast. She was hyperventilating, lying on the kitchen floor. Mike placed his hands on her arms, moving them up and down in hopes that it would calm her.

"Just breathe," he said quietly. She didn't open her eyes, she didn't whimper or scream. She brought one big breath in, gulping it down but never releasing it. "El," Mike said. He grabbed a hold of her shoulders, his stomach dropping from its place. "You have to breathe out," he said to her in a panic. "You have to breathe." El finally let her breath out, quickly bringing in another breath.

"Let me help," Lucas said over Mike's shoulder. "Let's move her to the bed." Mike looked up at his friend, worry lying in his eyes as he tried to get Mike off the floor. Lucas placed a hand on El's wrist. "She's cold," he said. Lucas looked around at their surroundings. "We need to move her." Mike finally found the ability to comprehend, nodding his head as he stood to his feet. He tried picking El up himself, but would have never gotten it done without Lucas helping. "Max is going to kill me when she finds out what's going on." Lucas said as they placed El in her bed. "I'm happy she's not here, but at the same time it would feel better if she was, you know?" Mike didn't answer.

He moved El away from the blood that still stained the sheets, moving her blanket over her small frame. She moved around slightly, her breaths calming at a slow rate. He let his eyes shut for just a second, thinking about just a few hours before; how they danced together at the Snow Ball. He opened his eyes back up, El laid pale, dark lines close to her eyes, and lips white.

"Shit," he heard Dustin mumbled from the kitchen. Something metal hit the top of the wooden table, Mike turned to look at Dustin. "Even if we get the bleeding to stop she's already lost so much blood." Dustin said. Mike and Lucas walked out of the bedroom door, looking

over to the girl that lay motionless.

"Think positive," Hopper said, moving to get supplies off the counter. Mike searched the room for Will, finding him in the bed by the fireplace. Lines, like El's, covered his face; he's skin clammy and white. Mike walked over to his friend feeling like he had failed. He told Will they would figure it out; he told his best friend that it was going to be okay. This didn't look okay.

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Hopper looked down at the girl; the blood was all over his kitchen table, the floor, and his hands. He moved fast, as he had Dustin take the metal kitchen prongs and shoved them into the hole to get the bullet out. Joyce panicked in the back as she tried to wake Will. El had stopped screaming, but she was hyperventilating, and Mike couldn't get her to stop.

"Just breathe," he could hear Mike's voice say behind him. He spoke softly as El let her breath slightly slow and stick in her lungs. Hopper drew the idea of her panic out of his mind as he patched the girl up. He listened to Lucas and Mike stumble behind them, bringing El into the other room as they worked. Dustin threw the bullet on the table as Hopper pressed the towel back onto the wound before reaching for the threading needle and dental floss.

He had given stitches only once when he was a big city cop in New York. A boy had been stabbed in a robbery, and he stitched the boy up as they waited for an ambulance to arrive. At the time he remembered the boy's cries from pain, his own hands shaking in his blood as he patched the boy. Now he saw his hands shake harder as he listened to the others all around the room. Dustin helps thread the Floss through the needle, handing it to him with a white face. He looked down at the girls face, just a little bit older than El. He swallowed hard as he put the needle through her skin.

Dustin took the towel every once and a while to dab the blood so he could continue. He stitched her six times before grabbing some cotton swabs, tapping them to the cuts to help the bleeding.

The girl half laid on the kitchen table. Her black jeans hung tight to

her skinny legs, her shirt off only in her bra. His grabbed the blanket from the back of the couch, draping it over her body and picking her up. Lucas stood in his way as he moved her to El's room. Everyone watched as he tucked her into bed next to El, and sighed heavily with exhaustion. He turned to see Jonathan leaning over Will in his bed. He had fallen to the floor, yelling, as him and Dustin tried to find the built in the girls shoulder. El's screams had rung through the cabin, piercing everyone's ears with sharpness making the wooden floors shake. Everything was confusing, and everything was happening so fast. He turned and looked at El in her bed, the dark lines by her eyes giving him concern.

"What do we do now," Mike said from the door way. "Our parents are going to flip, those guys are probably still out there looking for us, and now we have three people passed out, two of which look like they've been to the upside-down and back. I mean, that girl was shot." Mike squeaked, coming into the room to get a better look at her. He grabbed at the girls arms looking over the wrist. Hopper moved to look over his shoulder; her left wrist reading 001.

"What if she doesn't wake up," Mike continued looking back at Hopper. "What is El opened the gate again?"

"I don't know kid," Hopper said. He looked over to El, thinking about her smile that night, how ready she was to be normal. "I think you need to get some rest," he said to Mike. He grabbed the boys arm, leading him out of the room and to the couch where Dustin and Lucas sat. Mike took a seat in the middle, reminding Hopper of the first time he had talked to the boys at the school.

Dustin rubbed his hands between a towel, the blood sticking to his hands. Lucas's head shot up and down as he tried not to fall asleep. Nancy stood in the corner with Jonathan as Joyce held Will's hand in Hopper's bed. "We all need to sleep if we want to figure things out in the morning." Hopper said to everyone. "Jonathan," Jonathan's head shot up to him, dark circles all around his eyes. "You and I can keep watch first." Jonathan nodded his head, looking over to Nancy before heading back to the kitchen chairs. Hopper looked down at his watch, 4:34 A.M. He let out a huff of air before joining the boy by the front door, watching as everyone settled into their spots for the night.

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Her head hurt, her ears were ringing, and she felt like she was on fire. Something stiff was lying next to her, and before she opened her eyes she imagined for just one second that it could be Mike. Instead she was greeted by the bold headed girl. Tory lay on her back, her breaths coming out harshly with sweat dripping from her forehead. El put the back of her hand to the girl head, something she had seen Joyce do to Will multiple times before. She was hot, really hot.

She looked around her room, the cabin silent. The last thing she could remember was the pain, the burning and stinging of her shoulder as she sat in the void. She remembered the monster coming after her and her energy being drained as she tried to stop it from attacking her. She didn't know if it had gotten to her, all she could remember after that was the shaking and the lights. Bright white lights playing in her eyes as she screamed away her fear, and pain.

"It's okay," she heard a whisper come from the living room. "We'll figure this out," Joyce was there; with a whimper of what she assumed was Will. She sat up in her bed, looking back down at Tory with concern. She leaned over the girl gently as she tried to get herself out of the tangle of blankets and off the mattress.

The wooden floors felt cold on her toes, and the air felt a little stuffy as she slowly moved away from the girl and to her bedroom doorway. The sun was peeking through the plastic drop curtains throughout the cabin, and the floor was littered with sleeping people. She stepped over Hopper who lay in front of her door, his hat over his face, and a couch pillow under his head. Jonathan sat by the front door, his head bent low with the small rifle in his lap; Nancy sat beside him, her head on his shoulder. Joyce looked up from her spot on the living room bed, Will lying next to her with dark circles under his eyes. She and Will made eye contact before he quickly looked away.

"How are you feeling?" Joyce asked slowly standing from her seat. She let go of Will's hand, making her way to El, carefully stepping over Dustin and Mike who were asleep on the floor. Her head hurt, which was normal after having such a big effect on her power, but the dull pain in her shoulder was slowly driving her insane.

"I'm fine," she said quietly. She looked down behind her at Hopper, then back up at the kitchen. The small pot where Hopper made his coffee every morning was empty, and there were still dirty dishes in the sink from the morning before when they had breakfast. "Coffee," she suggested to Joyce, pointing towards the small kitchen. Joyce looked over at the coffee pot and they both made their way to the kitchen.

Joyce watched as she filled the small coffee pitcher, putting water into the coffee maker and grabbing the box and Folgers coffee before turning the machine on. They stared at one another while the coffee slowly dripped out, the smell filling the small cabin. El looked to the kitchen table, dried blood staining the red wood.

"Here," Joyce said after following her gaze. "Let's try something to get the blood out." Joyce rummaged through the kitchen cabinets, pulling out a bowl and finding some of their wash cloths. She took the soap from the sink, filling the bowl with hot water and adding the soap as it foamed over with steam. El watched as Joyce soaked the towel in the soapy water, covering the table with the warm solution. "We should let it sit for a second, but you don't want to do it for too long or it will ruin the wood." El nodded in understanding.

"Is that coffee I smell," El heard Hopper's voice say from under his hat. They watched as he stood from his spot on the floor, peaking into El's room with a frown. He looked over to El with a sigh, walking over and shaking his hand through her hair. "How are you feeling kid?" he asked her with a tired voice. She shrugged her shoulders, desperately wanting to say that she was tired, that Tory kept making her shoulder hurt, and that she thought she did something bad when she was in the void last night.

"I'm fine," she said to him. He let out a slight laugh while shaking his head.

"Yeah kiddo," he said to her, moving towards the coffee maker. "I'm sure you are." She squinted her eyes at him, not appreciating his tone. Joyce took a dry towel, side glancing both of them as she went back to the wet table. "So," Hopper continued. "Mind filling us in on what the hell happened last night, or are we going to pretend like everything is fine?"

"She was shot," EL said looking over to her bedroom door.

"Really," Hopper said back.

"I didn't know the bad men where here," El continued. She thought back to last night, holding Tory up as she looked at the unconscious man in front of Wills house. "Kali came, she wanted me to leave with them, and then the men found us in the woods." She thought about the snow, red with Tory's blood as she snapped the man's neck.

"So after everything you were just going to leave?" Hopper said to her. Her mind came back into focus, thinking of his words. "After this entire year of being together, after getting you that birth certificate, you were just going to go?" El sat with her mouth open, Joyce stood still a few feet away. Why would he think she would go? Why would he think she would leave everyone, leave her home. She felt anger course through her blood as she looked at him.

"I never said I agreed to leave," she fired back. Her voice slightly higher than his. "Is that what you think of me, that I would leave the second I had a chance?" he raised his eyebrows at her. She looked around the cabin, locking eyes with Nancy. She was being too loud, she was waking everyone up. "Home," she said a little louder. "This is my home," she pointed at Hopper, "you are my home." They looked at one another with blood shot eyes, both refusing to let a tear slip past their eye lids. "I am not as smart as everyone else," she continued, "but I do know the difference between people that want me and people that love me." She turned around to storm to her room. Dustin and Mike sat on the floor looking at her, Lucas standing from the couch. She stomped to her room, slamming the door before regretting her action. Tory stirred from her bed, moaning through her fever.

El wasn't stupid, she knew the girl was dying, and she knew the longer she stayed in this cabin with her the more weak she was going to feel. Eventually everyone else would feel it. They needed to get out of there, to figure out a plan. This was all her fault, the only reason everyone was hiding was because of her. The only reason Hopper spent all of his free time in the middle of nowhere was because of her. She wanted to hit something, or cry; she didn't know which one would feel better.

She thought about the darkness, how she could feel it inside Will last night. He was in the void with her; how, she didn't know. She let herself think about the energy she lacked, how she spent it all last night with the Demogorgon. The last time she opened the gate it was different, she saw the monster, throwing her energy out as self-defense. She had seen the opening in the lab, it had been instantaneous. Last night she had done the same thing. She had used her fear into her energy, but as she stood in her room looking around her walls she didn't see anything. There was nothing there to show that she had opened the gate, but it felt like she did. It felt like there was something out there, something coming. She didn't know how to stop it, how to hide from it.

"Water," she heard a small voice say. El looked over at Tory, her eyes still closed but her breathing picking up slightly heavier. "Water," she said again through her dried lips. El turned back to her bedroom door. Flying out, everyone look right at her as she stormed to the kitchen to fill a cup with water. Hopper bounced off from his spot on the counter, following her back into the room as El took a seat on the bed. She placed her hand on the back of the girls head, leaning it forward before putting the glass of water to her lips. The girl drank slowly, taking every sip with a big breath. El took the glass away, looking up at Hopper, her door way filled with everyone watching.

"Thank you," Tory said, slightly opening her eyes to look at El. "I'm not dead," she said. El let a small smile pass her lips and she nodded her head at the girl.

"How much does it hurt," Hopper asked, leaning over the girl and taking the blanket from her chest. He looked at her bandage, most of it red from blood. "I'm going to have to clean this," he said to her. "We don't want it to get infected." He looked over to El, leaving to get something to clean the wound with.

"I'm sorry," El said to her. She didn't really know what she was sorry for, but she heard that people said they were sorry when they didn't know what else to say.

"Me too," the girl said back. "I can't control who feels what when their around me." She let in a raspy breath. "Sometimes when I concentrate really hard I can control it, but most of the time I just

latch onto people and it happens." El shook her head.

"It doesn't hurt that bad," she said quietly to her. They remained silent for a moment, El looked around her room not knowing if she should talk or not.

"Did you find Kali," Tory asked. El looked into the girls eyes. Her face pale and clammy.

"I haven't looked," Hopper came back into the room with new bandages and a wet towel. He pushed El aside to get a closer look of the stitches. El watched as Tory hissed with pain, her shoulder twitching with a sting. She put her hand to her left shoulder, looking around to see if anyone saw.

"They probably ran," Tory said through gritted teeth. "They're really good at running." El nodded her head, knowing fully well that they were. "Last night," she continued at Hopper tapped the bandage over her shoulder. "I felt it," El leaned a little closer to her words. "I felt it there, in the darkness. It smelt of death, and made me feel like the world was falling around me." Hopper stopped his motions. Looking down at the girl, then up at El. She made eye contact with him, before turning away. She looked up at the snow glob that sat on her wall shelf. "Did it find you," Tory asked faintly. El didn't want to answer the question, not truly knowing what the right answer was. Was it the Demogorgon she was talking about, or was it the feeling she had now? The feeling of something coming, of something looking?

"I found it," Will's voice said from the door, causing El to jump in surprise. She looked over to the boy as he hunched over with lack of energy. His eyes were still darkened; blood still spotted his sleeve from when he cut her. "It was almost like a dream, like I couldn't stop myself from what was happening." El turned looking from Will to Hopper, then to Tory. She felt like the room was closing in, like the air was too sticky to breathe.

"I can't breathe," El said almost to herself. Her voice was short, almost a squeak. She was seeing spots as she tried to breath, looking around her as if the walls were closing in. She felt Hoppers hands on her shoulders, but she couldn't hear what his was saying, all she could

hear was her heart beat.

She pushed him out of the way, moving to the front door. She tripped over all the people in front of her, unlocking the door with her mind while pushing to chairs in front of the door out of her path. The sun was bright, and the air was cold. There was still a foot of snow everywhere, and the wood on the porch made her toe numb. She fell to her knees as she took in the air, not knowing what was happening. She felt like she was dying.

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"She's having a panic attack," Mike said as he pushed his way through everyone. He followed her out the door, bending down next to her to grab her shoulders. Her breaths were ragged like last night; she was gulping down air too fast and not letting it flow out of her lungs. "Breathe El," he said to her, feeling the panic radiate off of her.

"Get her back inside," Hopper said stepping onto the porch. Mike felt anger in him as he stared at Hopper.

"She needs fresh air," Mike said to him. "What do you expect to happen when you stuff her in a small space for so long?" he yelled.

"Keep your voice down," Hopper said to him. He watched as Hopper pulled her up, ushering her back inside. Mike stood stomping back after him.

"You can't keep her in here," Mike said leaving the front door open. "She can't take it anymore. There's too many people here, she's already been through so much. Just give her a chance to get some fresh air." Hopper placed her on the couch, Dustin taking a seat next to her to try and calm her down.

"She doesn't get that opportunity," Hopper said back. "They are looking for her, and they almost got her." Hopper placed his hands over his face; Mike looked around at everyone else. "We can't fight," Hopper said lowly. "We need to figure out how to get out of this. Not only are they looking for her, but now they're looking for all of us." Mike let down a gulp. He thought about his mother, how she probably walked into their rooms this morning and found that her

kids weren't there. He looked over to Nancy who was biting her lips trying not to freak out herself.

"Mike's right," Mrs. Byers said from the kitchen. Mike looked over to her with raised eyebrows. "We can't just keep her in here all the time. No one can live like that." Hopper let out a sigh.

"Where do we go then?" Hopper asked her. "Where can any of us go?" they all looked around at one another, waiting for an answer. "We have a girl that was shot who can't be moved right now, and we have a boy who is sleep walking and doing creepy shit in his sleep." Hopper looked down at El, her breath coming at a calming rate. "What did you see last night," Hopper asked her. "Why did the floor shake, why did the lights brighten? What did you see?" El looked up at him with tears in her eyes. She looked around the room, and Mike felt his heart sink when she looked at him.

"You can tell us," Mike said moving closer into the room. A gust of wind went through the cabin from the open door, but no one paid any attention to it. "You can trust us." She bit down on her lip, standing from her spot on the couch and moving into her room. She looked over to the girl that lay in her bed, Mike moved for the doorway to get a closer look. The girl tried pulling herself up from her spot, resting her back on the wooden rail from the bed post.

"Papa had her," El said, looking back at him, "and Kali got her out. That's how everyone ended back here, that's how Papa came to the house." Hopper moved into the room, to stand beside Mike. He could feel heat radiating off of Hopper like anger. "They wanted me to come with them, to help stop the bad men from hurting others." She looked back at the girl, her eyes darkening. "She says there's a darkness, one that is following me, but I think it's following Will more than me." She looked back at them, her eyes shallow as her mind went somewhere else. "I saw it, last night in the void. Will was there, but it was almost as if something was in his place." Mike had never heard her speak so much. He tried not to get distracted by her soft voice, but to concentrate on what she was saying.

The girl looked at them as El spoke. Watching Hopper with curiosity, and nodded her head slowly as El spit words out of her mouth. Mike could feel the chill of the outside filling the room as he listened to

everyone shuffle in the living room.

"I don't want to be here anymore," he heard Will whisper to his mom in the kitchen. Mike looked out the bedroom door to see Will looking at his mom with panic in his eyes. "Can't we go anywhere else?" Mrs. Byers put her hands on his shoulders, frowning down at him. Jonathan walked over, standing over them waiting for his moms answer. Lucas and Dustin leaned their butts on the back of the sofa, looking into El's room. He looked back at them; they raised their eyebrows at each other.

"Just give me a little bit," he heard Mrs. Byers say. "Let me make some plans in my head before I come to a decision." Will slumped a little bit by her answer.

"I don't want to be here either," El said softly to Hopper. She motioned around the room with her hands, "weird," she said. Hopper huffed out a breath at her. He looked around the room to see if anything was off and Mike did the same.

"It is coming," the girl said in a raspy voice. "This darkness," she looked right at El. "It has been latching onto my emotions, making everything seem dark in the light." Mike gave her a confused look. He turned and looked at the guys, all three staring at one another in thought.

"I have to go mom," Will said softly to his mom. Mike walked out of the room to get a better look at him. Will held his mother's arms, standing at the same height as her. "I have to get out of here," he said with tears in his voice. Mrs. Byers looked at him in question. Will began to back his way to the door.

"Will," Mrs. Byers said. "What are you doing?" Mike felt Hopper walk out of the room behind him, his boots stomping on the wooden ground. El appeared at his side. Will looked at her with tears in his eyes, his back to the open door way.

"Don't you feel it," He said to El. Mike look to his side, staring at her. She looked at Will through a squinted vision; her forehead crinkling in question. "Don't you feel like you have to run?" They stared at one another for just a moment, before Will turned his back to them and

ran out the door. El let out a breath, following him.

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She felt stupid, only because, like Will, she was running through snow with only her socks on. Her head was still hurting, but the further she got from the cabin the less her shoulder hurt. She could see Will a little ways in front of her. He ran through the deep snow, falling every once and a while. She could hear Hopper behind her a little distance off. There was also Joyce who was screaming Will's name. She looked back at her foot prints, wishing that there was a way to hide them. She could feel her cut bleed slightly on her chest as she moved her arms back and forth, trying to run faster toward Will.

It felt like they had been running forever. Will had slowed down after a while, giving El the chance to catch her breath. She could hear Will's breath go in and out harshly, and she ran fast to get to him. He bent over slightly, trying to breathe before he started to move again, so once she was close enough she grabbed his arm.

"It just feels like I can't get far enough," Will said to her through breaths. El felt a pull, like something was making her want to move. Her head gave a tinge of pain, and she closed her eyes to the bright snow. "I can't feel my feet," Will said to her with a wince.

"It might help to keep moving," she said pulling him forward. She thought back to the days she was on her own in the woods. How she would feel her face and ears go numb. After a while it didn't feel like cold, the air didn't feel like anything. "Where are we going?" She asked Will as she picked up their pace.

"I don't know," Will said to her. "It's weird," he continued, "it's like he's still inside of me; the Mind Flayer. I know he's not, but somewhere in the way back of my mind I still feel like he's there, just watching. "El looked around at her surroundings, trying to get her bearings as he talked. "Sometimes I feel the need to be in the cold," he stopped in his tracks, forcing El to stop with him. "Sometimes I feel like I want to hurt someone," he said to her, his eyes staring her down. She felt her stomach drop as she looked at him.

"Do you want to hurt someone now?" She asked Will in a low voice. He stared at her for a moment before answering.

"No," he said shyly, and then started to move forward. "I just need to get somewhere." They continued to walk in silence.

9. Chapter 9

Karen Wheeler was a caring mother; at least she tried to be. It was hard when you had three kids, all of different points in their childhood, begging for different types of attention that was rightfully needed. At times she couldn't keep track of her days, waking at the same time every morning, and making sure that everyone in the house hold was happy and ready for their day. It was hard putting on a smile, when most of the time she just wanted to lay in bed until the sun went down. She thought she was a good mother, a mother that tried and was willing to listen to her children, but when she walked into Michael's room; finding it empty. She didn't know what to think, maybe he had woken up already, and maybe he was already down in the basement working on his board game. It wasn't until she walked into Nancy's room that she felt something was off. She walked down stairs, pulling her robe closer to her body as she listened to the stillness of her house.

The basement was cold and dark. There was no one there except for her and that made her feel weary to where her children might be. She looked around the living room, then into the kitchen and the breakfast table, finding that everything looked the same from when she went to sleep last night. Everything in the fridge was still in its place; nothing had been eaten or moved by her kids that morning.

She went back to Mike's room, noticing his walkie talkie sitting on the covers of his bed, his pajamas on the floor by his closet. She picked up his pajama pants, they felt cold. She turned around, walking back into Nancy's room. Her pajamas sat by her closet, her bed unmade; she always made her bed in the morning. She picked Nancy's pajamas up, holding her kids cloths in her hands as she looked around the room in confusion.

"Mommy!" Holly's voice yelled from her room. Karen jumped, almost forgetting about the small girl. She placed the clothes on Nancy's bed, heading down the hall to Holly's room. He young daughter sat in her bed, her blonde hair in a crazy mess on top of her head. The little girl looked tired, she had dried drool on her face, and her small bunny in her hands had two skewered ears.

"Hey baby," Karen said, grabbing her daughter from the small bed. "How did you sleep?" she asked with a smile.

"I had a dream about gumdrops," Holly said through a strained tired voice. Karen carried her to the bath room; getting her ready for the day. She turned the shower on, undressing Holly as she waited for the steam to build. "Are you ready for the snow?" Karen asked while she placed Holly into the shower.

"No," Holly said placing her head under the hot water. Karen rolled her eyes, knowing fully well how excited Holly was yesterday to have a snow ball fight. "I don't like the snow."

"You seemed excited for it yesterday," Karen said, pouring shampoo onto the girl's hair. She looked around the bathroom and she rubbed the soap through the long hair. Holly placed two hands over her eyes so she didn't get soap in them.

"No I wasn't," Holly said back. "Mike said he would beat me in snow ball fight." Karen rolled her eyes. She thought back to Mike's empty bed, thinking about the snow that sat outside; hoping that he was at least smart enough to dress warm before he went outside.

She took Holly out of the shower, fight her to get clothes on, and then she tried to calm the girl down as she cried about what shirt she was wearing.

"I don't like yellow," Holly cried as they walked down stairs.

"You said two days ago that yellow was a great color." Karen said back in the nicest voice she could create.

"No," Holly said through tears. "I hate yellow." Karen rolled her eyes as she put Holly in a chair at the dining room table. Ted's footsteps sounded down the stairs as Karen looked at the coffee pot, realizing she hadn't put the coffee on yet. She worked fast, filling the machine with water and ground coffee before pulling a pan from a bottom cabinet and eggs from the fridge. She listened to Holly's huffed breaths as the girl tried to calm her tears, Ted walked into the room with the new paper; taking a seat next to the small girl.

Karen watched as he opened his paper with no hesitation, leafing through the pages to find the sports section. He ignored Holly as she looked up at him, fresh tears in her eyes as she tried to pout at her father. Karen rolled her eyes, trying hard not to yell at the man before turning back to the coffee and filling a mug while the machine kept brewing.

She was half way to the table when she heard the doorbell ring. She stopped at the table, placing the mug of coffee by Ted, before looking at the hall way the led to the front door. She let her stomach drop slightly, thinking about the empty beds upstairs and how unusual it was that someone would be ringing their door bell so early on a Saturday.

She slipped out of the kitchen and down the hall, walking to the front door slowly as she realized she was still wearing her bath robe, her hair a mess on top of her head. She sighed as she unlocked the door, opening it slowly to the cold. Her eyes grew as she looked at a familiar sight. Men walked around her front yard, Hawkins Energy vans littered the street, and the gray haired man from a year ago standing on her front porch. He gave her a smile as she let a frown play on her face.

"Mrs. Wheeler," the man said to her. She looked back out into the front yard, the beautiful snow being stomped on as men walked around her house, looking through her windows and walking into her back yard.

"What are you doing?" She said in a harsh tone.

"It seems we have had a little hiccup," the man said. "May I come in side Mrs. Wheeler?" Karen looked back out to her front yard, before stepping aside and letting the man into her house.

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Steve Harrington sat at the front desk of the Hawkins Police Department. He looked at the front door for the hundredth time, looking down at the pile of memos that kept building for Chief Hopper. He knew that Hopper liked to take his Saturdays slow, but by this time he was usually in, already eating a doughnut and

smoking a cigarette. He glanced at his phone, not knowing how to get ahold of the man.

Luckily the day had been slow. Steve had made it in late because of the snow, and the only calls he was getting were about how the roads needed more salt. Ms. Penilton called about how the snow plows put more snow in her yard, and the only thing minorly bad was two cars running into each other at five miles an hour.

Steve sighed; listening to the policemen in the other room laugh at one another as they let the news play in the back ground. The phone at his desk started to ring, making Steve roll his eyes to who it could be. If someone called one more time to tell him there was too much snow on the side walk he was going to lose it.

"Hello, Hawkins Police Department, Steve Harrington speaking," he said lowly, grabbing a pencil and a sheet of paper to take down any notes. He heard a little shuffling on the other end before someone started talking.

"This is Karen Wheeler," Steve sat up straight, listening more carefully. Why was Nancy's mom calling? "There are men at my house," she continued in a hushed tone. "They say they work for the government, but they've been here before and I don't think they are." Steve dropped his pencil, standing from his seat and looking around him for his car keys. "My son and daughter are missing, and I think it has something to do with them. I didn't know who else to call."

"Just hang tight Mrs. Wheeler," Steve said over the phone. "I'll head right over." There was a moment of silence over the line. He could hear her place the phone on the receiver without saying goodbye. He looked around his desk, sliding papers in hope of finding his keys, before realizing they were in his pocket.

He drove fast, at least faster than he should in the snow. He slid to a stop in the slush road, the curb lined with white vans, men standing around the front yard. He rushed out of the car, walking up the front step as he side-glanced the men. One man with a long mustache stood in front of the front door, his arms crossed over his chest.

"Can I help you son," the man said to Steve. They glared at one

another for a moment. Steve tried to collect his thoughts before stepping a little bit closer.

"Yes, I'm here to see Nancy." Steve said, looking all around the front of the house, watching as the men standing in the yard got a little closer. "I actually heard she was missing and thought I could help. I'm her boyfriend," he gave the guy a smile, looking behind him one more time.

"Well," the man said, stepping a little closer to Steve, "The Wheeler's are a little busy at the moment. I'm going to have to ask you to come back later." Steve glared at the man, trying to figure out another game plan. He let out a breathe; the puff of air dancing in front of his vision as he listened to the crunch of snow behind him. He watched as all the men circled around him, treating him like he was a threat. Was he, could he ever be?

Before he could even think of defending himself the front door opened, Mrs. Wheeler standing with a gray haired man. She locked eyes with Steve, her face filled with concern. Steve looked at the man that stood next to her; his face held a full smile as he looked back to Mrs. Wheeler.

"We'll be in touch," the man said. "Do know that your kids are our top priority." Mrs. Wheeler nodded he head as he took a step out of the door, looking at Steve with questionable eyes. "Steve Harrington," the man said. Steve raised his eyebrows, not knowing what to say. "I'm sure you remember some of these men from last year?" Steve looked around himself, all the men from the yard standing close behind him.

"I suppose," he said looking back at the gray haired man.

"Well, I assure you, we will find your girlfriend." Steve looked at the man, stepping past him as he walked inside.

"Well, I suggest you get to it," Steve said before slowly closing the door. He placed the lock in its socket, looking to Mrs. Wheeler who had tears in her eyes.

"Where's Nancy?" she asked, folding her arms across her chest. She still stood in her bath robe, her hair a nest on top of her head. The

few times he had spent with Nancy family he had never seem Mrs. Wheeler so unorganized.

"I don't know," Steve said looking around the house. "Did those guys look around your house?" Mrs. Wheeler nodded her head, making Steve sigh. He looked at all the light fixtures and house décor, thinking of all the places they could have put bugs. "I think you and I should go for a drive," Steve said. Mrs. Wheeler looked down the hall, Holly bouncing her fork off the plate in the kitchen. He let out a long sigh.

"Ted!" she called down the hall. There was no answer as she made her way to the stairs. "Ted!" she yelled louder.

"What?" he sang in an annoyed voice.

"I think I'm going to head out for a little bit," she paused in the silence, "maybe see if I can find the kids myself." Steve heard a chair being pulled back and Ted stood from his seat at the dining room table. He appeared in the door way, looking down the hall as Mrs. Wheeler stood at the top of the landing.

"Karen," he said in a concerned voice, "I think we should leave it to the professionals." She looked over to Steve as he stood in the awkwardness of the couple.

"I won't be long," she said to him. "Just watch Holly for a little bit, please." Ted looked into the kitchen behind him, looking back at his wife with no expression.

"What do I do with her?" he asked with a monotone voice. Mrs. Wheeler huffed turning her back to him and walking the rest of the way to the top of the stairs. Steve and Ted looked at one another. Steve could hear Holly humming in the back ground as they stood in silence. "You a cop now?" Ted asked.

"Umm," Steve shoved his hands into his pockets. "No sir, I just work with the department. Mainly answering phone and such." The both nodded their heads as one another, listening to Mrs. Wheelers footsteps as she walked around upstairs. Steve stared at a picture of Nancy, trying to think of the last time he had talked to her. He tried

to image where she could be, what could have happened. He looked back at Ted with announce, as Mrs. Wheel ran down the steps. She was wearing jeans and a long winter coat. Her hair still nested on the top of her head, her face free of makeup.

If he had told himself this morning that he would be teaming up with Mrs. Wheeler to figure out what government secrets were now happening in their town he would have laughed; he would have laughed hard. As he opened the front door for the woman, he stared back at Ted as he watched his wife leave, making him stay with the three year old daughter he had no connection with.

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Mike hugged his jacket to his body as he let his ankles sink into the snow. He followed behind Nancy as she carried the black gun she had gotten from one of the men at the Byers house. Hopper's voice called El's name again as they moved forward in the cold. He looked up at the sky; there were still clouds that hug over their heads, and a slight gust of wind coming from their left.

Nancy looked back at him, making sure he was still there as they pushed forward. He could see her tremble from cold, her thick boots making the snow crunch with every step she took. Joyce walked behind her, Jonathan at her side. They had been walking for an hour and Mike new that soon they would come across the quarry if they kept walking in this direction. He looked around the forest, trying to see further ahead.

She said she wouldn't leave, yet here they were walking to find her again. She had promised, yet she had run out of the door like it didn't mean anything to her. He felt anger towards the situation. He thought about his mother, and about his father. Did they ever break their promises?

Hopper came running back to them, his face red with cold. His hand wrapped around his gun as he pointed behind him.

"I think they're heading towards the quarry," Hopper said to them. He could hear Joyce pick up her speed in the back, walking past Mike as he looked over to Nancy, she let out a breath that puffed into the air;

walking forward through the deep snow.

Mike listened to the silence. Every time snow would come there was always a moment of silence as nature tried to wrap its roots around the freezing temperatures. There was no wind, there were no birds singing, and he couldn't see any animals in the distance as they continued on their journey. Joyce said a few things to Hopper at the front of the line; Hopper looked forward as if not listening to her. Nancy lowered her gun a little, placing her right hand on Jonathans arm in reassurance. Mike sighed looking behind him, no one was following, and all that was left was their foot prints.

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El watched as Will walked closer to the iced over water. Piles of rocks stood beside them, and a large cliff looked over them as they got closer. She couldn't hear Hopper calling her anymore, but she wasn't too worried about where he might be. She knew he was probably close behind, and that gave her ease to the situation.

"Don't you feeling like swimming sometimes?" Will asked over his shoulder. His feet were beat red, mostly from the cold ice, but she could see the mud starting to form as they walked through the snowy dirt to the water. She did want to swim, but not now. It was far too cold, and the water was frozen over. There was also the situation of not knowing how to swim, and El was a little to embarrassed to say that she couldn't.

"Sometimes," she said to him shyly, stepping closer to where he stood. She watched as Will put his foot onto the ice, testing it with a little bit of weight. El grabbed his shoulder before he put his other foot onto the small pod, making him stop and look at her with angry eyes. "What are you doing?" She asked in confusion.

"It like he's close," Will said looking at her. "Its like I can feel him in the air." El looked up at the sky, looking for anything that looked unusual. Will shrugged her hand off his shoulder, taking another step onto the hard cold surface. El watched as he took on carful step after another, getting further away from the shore line. She looked behind her to see if anyone was there, but found that she was left alone as Will got further away. She looked down at the ice, not knowing if she

should fallow. The feeling of running away was fleeting since she lost track of time about thirty minutes ago. She now felt stupid for following Will all the way out here with no shoes and jacket.

She let her cold foot stand on the ice, feeling how slippery it was, the cold causing a little pain as it chilled to her bone. She watched Will fall onto his butt, a quite thud sounding as he let out a small groan. She put her other foot onto the small lake, letting herself glide a little letting her arms fly out to her side to keep her balance. Will stayed seated on the ice, crossing his legs as he looked up to the sky; searching.

"Look," he said, pointing somewhere past the high cliff and trees. El looked up as she slid towards him, a black cloud danced its way down to them, the haze growing darker as it got closer. El could feel its presence, the sound of a whoosh made her spin shiver. She tried to skate her way closer to Will, putting her hand up to pull him towards her. He started to slide on his butt, trying to put his hands down on the ice to make his movements stop. He cried out as he bumped into her leg, making her fall onto her side, the ice giving a little snap as it slightly cracked.

"Don't," Will yelled at her as she tried to sit up a little bit. She saw a darkness circle around them, and she tried to block Will the best that she could. She put her hand up as if that would stop it, trying to focus on where it was going to go so she could direct her energy.

It formed a small tornado around them, the sound of its winds engulfing her ears. She let out panicked breaths as Will watched in wonder, a small line of black rising from the other, moving closer into the circle to get to them. She pulled energy from her core, still drained from the night before. She pushed the line of black back like she had when she closed to gate, as other raised over their heads. She lifted her other arm, gather energy to the blackness as it tried to rain down on them. She cried out as its weight became heavier on her energy, the sound of ice cracked under them and she started to feel cold water seep through the large lines in the ice.

She looked over to Will; she saw a slight change in his eyes as he began to realize what was happening. His face turned into to fear as the black smoke pushed in on them. He looked all around them as his

breath became faster, his chest rising and falling with speed. She could feel herself falling, as the ice gave out under the pressure. She let out a cry as she let her powers fall and she grabbed a hold of Will; but it was too late. The darkness flew into his mouth causing him to stop his movements as they fell into the ice cold water. It was time to learn how to swim.

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Hopper ran forward as he watched the dark cloud fall from the sky. He ran from the tree line and down the frosted dirt path to the frozen water; watching in horror as it circled around El and Will. He heard Joyce yell behind him, quickly grabbing Mike as he ran past him to get onto the ice.

"Let me go," Mike yelled as Hopper watched the black cloud force its way down onto the kids. He looked at the ice in front of him, wondering if it could hold their weight or not. He heard gravel crunch behind them, not registering that there was a car approaching. He let Mike go, pushing the boy behind him as he tried to take a step onto the ice, watching spider webs crack under his feet because he was too heavy. He heard a loud snap as he watch the ice in the middle of the small pool of water break, the black cloud flying up. He saw El and Will fall into the water as the cloud found its way into Wills mouth, El grabbing him as they went under. He heard fast foot steps behind him, Steve coming into his view as he slid onto the ice. He used the momentum the slide onto the side of his butt, flying to the large watered hole and falling in without thought.

Hopper looked for Joyce, who stepped forward with tears in her eyes, Karen Wheeler stepping closer with a gasp. Mike turned to look at her, him and Hopper met eye to eye with confusion. He turned back to the water, holding his breath waiting for Steve to come back up with the kids. He heard Nancy throw down her gun, taking off her jacket and stepping forward.

"Nancy?" He heard Karen say. Nancy stepped onto the ice with hesitation, slowly sliding to the middle of the water, stopping before getting to the hole of ice. She looked down into the water, and then back at Hopper. She took in a big breath, jumping in to help.

It only took a few second before Nancy and Steve came up holding Will. They worked together to get him back onto the ice, Jonathan taking a step in front of Hopper, before Hopper stopped him.

"We can't have too many people out there," He said to the young man. They all watched as Nancy tried to get herself out of the water, having a hard time as the ice cracked under her hands. After the forth try she got herself up, dragging Will on his back, back to shore while Steve let out a huffed heavy breath, letting himself fall under the water. As Nancy came to shore her mother grabbed her coat, reaching for her with a cry while Jonathan grabbed Will, listening for a breath. Tires came to a stop behind them, as Hawkins energy vans crowded around the wide dirt path.

"Shit," Hopper said, pushing Joyce and Jonathan out of the way to pick Will up and bring him to Karen's car. Jonathan followed him, opening the back door of the car while Hopper placed the wet boy on the seat. He heard a breath come from Will, his eyes still closed. He looked back out to the water, watching at Steve came up with a gasp, holding El in his arms as she let out a cry. He looked behind him as men fell out of the vans with guns; Hopper ran forward trying to figure out a plan.

"Don't move!" one of the men shouted as Hopper got closer to the water. "Nobody move or we will shoot!" Hopper stopped, Karen let out a panicked cry as she hugged Nancy, her teeth chattering. Mike looked from the gun on the ground to the men coming towards him. He met Hoppers eyes in panic, Hopper shook his head while he put his hands up. One of the guys put the head of their gun to his back.

He could see El in panic mode as Steve helped her on the ice. She made him stop mid-way, not standing but sitting on her knees as she looked for Hopper in the crowd. He saw tears form in her eyes, and behind him he could hear Joyce screaming from the car.

"Get your hands off him!" she yelled as Hopper heard a few scuffles in the dirt. He heard a fist hit skin, and looked over his shoulder slightly to see Jonathan on the ground, his hand holding his cheek. He saw Brenner form the corner of his eyes, a smirk on his face as he walked in front of Hopper and looked him in the eyes.

"Well," Brenner said. "Everything seems to be in place." Brenner nodded his head to the man behind Hopper. A man grabbing his wrists, and Hopper tried for a moment to fight back. Another man appearing to his side, a gun pointed at his gut. "I want to thank you for taking good care of her, but I think she has over stayed her welcome." Brenner turned back to the water, walking to the shore line, looking at El. She let out a cry as Mike when for the gun, but was stopped by one of the men. Grabbing Mike and throwing him to the ground. Karen let out a cry as they tied his hands behind his back. Hopper felt the plastic zip tie tightly rap around him own wrists. He let out a growl of frustration.

Steve stood on the Ice with El, not know where to go or what to do. Him and Hopper made eye contact, every thought in Hoppers mind being jumble by the fact that they had lost, he had failed her. He could see her crying as she sat on the ices. Her teeth chattered as she tried to focus on her energy, but he could tell that she was tired; she was cold. He watched as one of the men slowly came onto the ice; his small frame holding a gun at the two of the, Steve held his grip harder onto El shirt as the man got closer.

"Just give us the girl," Brenner said to Steve. The two backed up on the ice a little bit as the man got closer to them; he pointed the gun at Steve, grabbing his arm. Steve pushed the guy, and Hoppers heart stopped. The guy yelled, aiming at Steve, but not shooting.

"Get on the ground!" Steve fell to his knees as the the guy pushed him away from El. She gave a small scream as he lurch forward at her, she crawled on the ice, moving towards the shore. The man grabbed the back of her shirt, pulling her up and pushing her forward. Steve yelled from his spot on the ice, as El slid and fell to her knees with a smack. Hopper moved forward with a growl, the man to the side of him jabbing the gun into his side. She slid to a stop in front of Brenner, her face covered in blood from before. He bent down and pulled her up by the front of her shirt, dark line forming around her eyes. He pulled her onto land, pushing her onto the ground as she fell onto the dirt and rocks.

"Hey!" Hopper and Mike yelled at the same time. Mike tried to fight the guy that loomed over him, his hands tied behind his back as he flailed on the ground. Brenner pulled a needle from his pocket;

Hopper could see a black liquid that filled it. He launched himself forward, not caring about the gun or the restraints to his hands. Brenner uncapped the needle as El looked up at him, letting out a loud cry. She creamed as Brenner flew back, landing on the ice hard, making it crack all around him as he, his gun man, and Steve fell into the water.

El continued to scream, and Hopper watched as blood poured from her eyes, ear, and nose. Mike struggle as the guy stood from him, backing up from the boy in fear. Mike pushed himself forward to get to El, as he screamed her name. Hopper let himself run forward as the men with guns backed up slowly, their guns pointed at her as she cover her ears with her hands; crying louder and louder. Mike got to her first, yelling her name as she held her head in pain. Hopper watched the rocks fell from the high cliff that hung over the cold water. A large crack forming up the cliffs edge, snapping and rumbling. Hopper bent in front of her, yelling her name with Mike to get her to calm down. The piles of rock starting to levitate in the air, Karen grabbed Nancy, moving back towards the car.

Hopper watched as all three men moved out of the water, a needle still in Brenner's hands. Hopper looked to Mike, as they watched the cracks on the cliff get wider, dark roots sprouting out of the crevasses.

"She's opening it," Mike said loudly. "She's opening the gate!" Brenner came running out to her, lifting his hand with the needle and throwing it into her neck. Hopper and Mike sat in horror, not able to do anything with their hands behind their backs. Hopper watched at her screams turned into small cries, her eyes slightly opening to look up at them before she slumped onto the ground. She was out cold.

"El?" Mike said leaning over her. Hopper looked down at her, anger washing over his vision as he looked up at Brenner. Men circled in around them, pilling Mike up and dragging him away. Karen yelled from behind him as he felt someonep ull at the plastic ties on his wrist. Brenner bent down, picking her up in his arms, Els body looking so small and weak.

"Don't touch her," Hopper yelled, he was seeing red. "You son of a bitch! I swear to god if you do anything to her!" he pulled with his

wrists, trying to launch himself forward. Brenner let out a little laugh.

"Look around you chief," Brenner said, walking past Hopper with El in his hands. "You have no chance of winning." Hopper got pulled with Mike up the dirt path, Steve behind them; a gun to his back. Karen stood at her car, her arms around Nancy who shivered. She walked forward to Mike, grabbing him from the man that guided him; glaring at the man before taking him back to the car. Jonathan sat in the back seat, blood running from his mouth while Joyce stood by one of the van. Hopper guessed Will sat inside of it.

Three vehicles lined the path; Brenner stepped into the back one with El, looking back at Hopper. He saluted, stepping into the van and sliding the door shut. They ushered Steve and Hopper to the second car, pushing them both inside. Steve shivered next to him, his clothes soaking the long seat that they shared. Hopper looked out the front window, watching as one of the men cut the zip ties off of Mike's wrists, as Mike pushed the man away from him. Two guys got into the front seat, while another man got in the back with them, his gun held up ready to shoot if he needed to.

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Lucas didn't know how it happened. One minute they were sitting in the cabin, Dustin was checking the girl's stitches while Lucas sat on the couch watching the fire. They had been left alone for an hour; the others running after Will and El into the snow. Lucas was thinking about food, he was thinking about how hungry he was and how his mother had talked about making sausage and pancakes in the morning. He sighed, hating himself for leaving in the middle of the night, and realizing that he was going to be in deep shit when he got home.

Dustin walked out of the bedroom, taking a seat next to Lucas with a groan, looking into the flames of the fire place. He rubbed his hands together, looking over to the kitchen and then back. They didn't know when anyone would be home, and they only stayed because they felt bad for the girl. They couldn't just leave her behind because they wanted to go home

There was a creak on the porch, both of their heads shot to the side as footsteps could be heard outside. They stood from their seats on the couch, slowly walking forward to the door. Dustin crept his head by the front window, lifted the shade to the side to peak out the window. He dropped the shade, Lucas saw as Dustin shook his head; telling him not to open the door.

"Is it the lab guys," Lucas whispered. Dustin shook his head.

"Some punk weirdos," Dustin said. "One has a really big mohawk." Lucas scrunched up his face in confusion. A knock sounded at the door, making both of the boys jump high. Dustin looked around the kitchen area, pulling out a large knife from one of the drawers. He started rifling through the drawers looking for another one, making a loud noise as he moved around metal silver wear. Lucas shushed him, walking over and smacking him in the arm.

"What is wrong with you," Lucas said in a harsh whisper. Another knock sounded at the door, they both stopped their movements looking at the door with large eyes.

"Hello," a guy said in a sing songy voice. "We can hear you in there." Lucas let out a sigh, looking over to Dustin with a nasty look.

"We're looking for a girl," another voice said. She had an accent, her voice slightly soft. "Open this door," she said with a little more force. Lucas looked from the door to Dustin, then into El's room where the girl lay, sleeping with a heavy breath.

"Open this door!" someone else yelled from the outside.

"I can knock it down," a deeper voice said to the group. Lucas walked to the door, looking at the locks debating if he should do it. Dustin came behind him with his Knife, getting himself ready. Lucas put his hands to the locks, undoing them one at a time before slowly peeking through a crack of the door. His eyes landed on the five people that sat on the porch, a girl with big hair stood at the forefront, her eyes glaring back at him.

"Boy," the girl said to him, putting her hand on the door and pushing it back a little bit. "I know she's here, she has found me in her sleep."

Lucas looked back at Dustin; they both raised their eyebrows at one another. "Let us in and we will be on our way." He shrugged his shoulder, opening the door a little bit wider. The girl walked past him, her group trailing close behind.

"She was shot," Dustin said, following her into the room. "We took the bullet out, made sure to disinfect it, and gave her some stitches." Lucas looked at the group of people; their punk look making him feel slightly uncomfortable.

"Where's Jane," the girl said. Lucas walked behind the large black man, cramming himself into the room with everyone else. Dustin and Lucas made eye contact, not sure what to say.

"Umm," Lucas looked at everyone around the room. "She stepped out." Everyone looked at him; he let his head fall slightly. The big man he had followed into the room walked to the bed, looking down at the girl before lifting her into his arms. They all stood in silence for a moment, looking at one another in awkwardness.

"Tell Jane I will find her," the girl said. "Tell her here sister came for her, and she will be back." The boys looked at one another once again, both nodding their heads in understand as the group walked out of the room. They slowly walked out of the door, the girl with big white hair closing it behind her.

"I have a bad feeling," Dustin said. "Like something isn't right." Lucas rolled his eyes, walking to the front door and locking it.

"No shit Sherlock," he said loudly. "This is weirder than it usually is, I'm still waiting for some monster to pop out of the floor boards." Dustin walked out of El's room, putting the knife on the kitchen table and rubbing his eyebrows.

"We need to get out of here," Dustin said. "I'm going to be skinned alive by my mother. She's going to take away my Nilla Wafers, and will make me watch Mrs. Claires kids again; I just can't take that kind of stress." Lucas let out a strong sigh, making sure his coat was button tight.

"Fine," he said turning back to the door, "let's get out of here." They

bother looked around the cabin, making sure they didn't forget anything before closing the door.

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Mike sat in the back seat of his mom's car with Jonathan. They were following the vans down the high way; Mike looked ahead trying to remember which one El was in. He thought she was in the middle of the three vans.

He could feel cuts around his wrists from the plastic restraints. Nancy sat in the front seat, her teeth chattering as his mother turned up the heater. They had taken Will into another van, Joyce staying with him while the poked and prodded at him. Mike let out a sigh, his leg bouncing up and down with nerves.

"How many times do I tell you kids that you can talk to me," his mother said through a strained voice. Mike honestly felt bad; his mother just got thrown into something that was way bigger than she could ever understand. He thought about his dad, how he was probably sitting at home trying to figure out how to feed a three year old.

"We're sorry," Nancy said. "It was safer not to say anything then say something. We didn't want to bring you into this mess."

"I don't even know what this mess is," his mom said loudly. She slammed one of her hands on the stirring wheel, glancing though the rearview mirror at Mike and Jonathan. Mike slammed his back into the seat, crossing his arms onto his chest. He looked over at Jonathan, who was biting his nails glancing out the front window at the vans. "Mike," his mom said in a quiet voice, "is this why you've been so emotion all year." Mike rolled his eyes, she had no idea.

"I don't want to talk about it," he said biting his lip. They drove for at least thirty minutes, passing the Byers house, heading the same way to the cabin. Mike watched as they passed the snow covered tall trees, listening to the heater as it blasted out of the car vents. He thought about last night, how it felt like a million miles away. He let butterfly's play in his stomach as he replayed the kiss he shared with El, letting the air out of his lungs in a hard humph. He was mid-way

playing though his memory for the third time, when he heard screeching tire, his sister let out a scream, while they all flew forward. His mother slammed the breaks hard, as he heard loud crashing all around him. Their car slid to the side, spinning in a circle down the road. Mike couldn't see anything that was happening; everything went past his eyes in a quick flash. The car came to a fast stop, everyone breathing hard.

Mike looked around the car. They hadn't been hit, but something must have happened for them to be sitting side ways in the middle of the road. He could hear his sister and mother slightly crying, Jonathan flew out of the door. He stood in shock with his hands on his head and Mike looked around him. One van was perfectly fine, the one that had been in the back of the line. He looked to his right; the first two vans were flipped. One had been rammed hard, while the other had just skid on the ice. A tan van sat in the grass off the road facing the trees, the front of it smoking.

Mike watched as Jonathan run to the crash site, Mike unbuckled himself, his heart racing a mile a minute. Men ran out the van in the back, Steve and Hopper falling out along with them. Steve pulled a knife from the back of Hopper pocket, cutting his cuffed wrists. Hopper massaged them as he ran forward, Mike falling out of the car to follow them. He could hear his mom scream his name but he ignored her, his breath catching as he looked at both of the vehicles. One had El, and the other had Will and Mrs. Byers. He felt tears fall from his eyes, the salt touching his lips as he watched Hopper scream at Steve to go to one van while he went to the other. Mike stood in shock, not know what to do with what was happening.

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El lifted her eye lids slowly, feeling her arms locked down. She looked around her surroundings, a spot light ahead of her, something caused a bump, making her head hurt. She was moving, or she was in something that was moving. Her eye sight was getting less foggy. She was lying in a small space, her arms tide to metal bars on each side of the bed she was laying on. She felt weak, light she had run for hours without stopping.

"Rise and shine," she heard a voice say. Papa's face came into her

view; his body hunched over her. "I've missed you," he said lightly to her, moving hair from her face gently. El's breath hitched in her lungs, as she tried to move her arms; forgetting they were tied down. "You might feel a little weak for a while. I gave you some medicine, to make you better." El looked around herself, trying to get her bearings.

"Hopper," she said lightly, her voice cracked. She could feel her heart beat rising, her breath moving fast as she started to panic. "Hopper!" she yelled closing her eyes in hopes that it was just a dream.

"Hey," papa said, putting his hands on her shoulder, trying to get her to calm down. "He's just in the van behind us," El stopped moving, looking at the metal walls again. She was in a van, they were moving. She tried to focus, to concentrate on what was happening around her. She couldn't focus, her mind was mush, and her body was weak. She could feel tears forming in her eyes as she let herself panic. "I'm taking you to your new home, where you'll be safe."

El was crying, and her chin was trembling. She let a whimper leave her lips as she looked up at the man that brought her fear. Brenner, that was his name, and he wasn't her papa. Her breath stuck inside of her as she thought about her family; picturing Hopper dancing as he played music from his singing machine. How Mike smiled every time he got the opportunity to help her understand something. She stopped her crying, looking up at the man that showed her hell, showed her how lucky she was to get away from him. He looked down at her, his eyes filled with fake concern.

Her eyes were squinting as she tried to draw as much energy as she could. She could almost feel something deep in her mind, but every time she got ready to use it she felt it fall back. She felt blood fall from her nose, her head hurting as if her was pounding it against a wall.

"You can try all you want," Brenner said to her. "You won't be able to use any power until your medicine wears off," El didn't understand. She knew what medicine was, but the only time she ever took it was when Hopper told her she had something called a flu. "Just hang tight," he placed his hand on her arm. He moved forward to the front of the van, talking softly to someone at the front. She took the alone

time to figure out how she was going to get out, how she was going to find Hopper, and her family.

She heard Brenner gasp, the sound of a loud screech, tired screaming. At first she didn't know what was happening, everything was so loud, there was screaming. Before she knew it she felt herself lurch to the side, the bed she was tide to flipping, and she felt like something cut across her face. The underside of the bed and metal bars protected her from anything else. She could hear metal crunching, and then everything was silent. She saw darkness for a few seconds, opening her eyes when she started choking. Smoke was filling up the space; she couldn't hear anyone in the car say anything. Was she alone?

There was a pop and then a slam as the doors behind her opened. She could hear Hopper voice curse as she felt the bed being shoved to the side. She couldn't move, she couldn't think as she felt one arm get cut from its bindings. It fell across her body as she slid forward from the bed. Hopper put his hand on her chest before she could fall, cutting her other arm from the metal bar.

"I got you kid," He said softly. "Can you hear me?" She nodded her head as he lifted her into his arms. She could feel the cold breeze from outside, the bright light of the sun making her eyes sting. She closed them hard, trying to focus on her breathing. "Get in the car now!" She heard Hopper yell. There were shoes on the pavement as he listened to car doors open. He felt Hopper slide her into the back of the car, a hand brushed across her face as Hopper moved away from her.

"I need you to drive," Hopper said from outside. "I need you to drive and keep going. Once you feel like you've gotten far enough find a phone and call the Byers house."

"What about my family," she heard a woman say. El tried opening her eyes, her right hand moving her cover them from the light. Her head was resting in a lap, and she could see blood covering her fingers. "My daughter is still at home, Ted can't take care of her."

"Just give me a day," Hopper was standing at the back door, talking over the top of the car. Nancy sat in the front seat. El looked at who her head was resting on, Mike was staring forward at whoever

Hopper was talking to.

"Mom get in the car," Nancy said. She could hear the woman sigh, feeling the car shake as she sat in the driver's seat.

"You don't take your eyes off of her," Hopper said, bending over to look through the door. His finger was pointed at Mike, his face stern. "If she runs you follow, if she falls you pick her up, you understand me?"

"Loud and clear," Mike said back. She looked up at him as he looked down at her, putting a hand in her hair. She felt Hopper touch her leg. She looked over to him, seeing tears in his eyes.

"Don't be stupid," he said to her before closing the door. She felt the car fly forward; Mike pulled her closer as she closed her eyes to the pain.

10. Chapter 10

Hopper watched as Steve jumped into the over turned van. Karen's car flew down the road, carrying the kid away, making his heart sink a little. He rushed over, listening to coughs as the van filled with smoke. A large bump on the back side showing where the tan van had hit it. Steven popped his head out of the door, pushing will up to hand to Hopper. Jonathan grabbed the boy, his skin cold and sweaty. Hopper watched as he placed Will onto the ground before Hooper jumped onto the car to help Steve with Joyce.

He listened to her slight cry as Steve tried to lift her through the door. Hopper got her down from the van; she was unable to stand on her left leg. A cut ran across her right cheek, blood spilling down her face.

"We can take the other van," Steve yelled, jumping down onto the pavement. Him and Hopper looked to the van they had been placed him, men shuttling the other van drivers into the back of the vehicle. They watched as they carried Brenner into the back of the van, the vehicle backing up swiftly before leaving them stranded in the road. "What about the other van," Hopper looked around them. Between the two broken down cars was the tan van, smoke slowly coming out of the front. Hopper leaned Joyce on Steve, walking over Will.

"Hello!" Hopper yelled, coming to the tan door. He looked through the passenger window. A young girl with purple-pink hair sat in the seat, passed out. Blood ran down her face, the girl in the driver seat next to her leaned over the steering wheel. He came around the front of the car, slipping slightly on the iced grass. He listened to the van door slide open, a large man stepping out of the back. He pulled a girl with large blonde hair from the back door, placing her in the wet snow before going back in. Hopper moved quickly, opening the front door to get the girl's out.

"Make sure they lay flat," the man said to Hopper.

"I know," he yelled back. He rushed to the other side of the car, pulling the passenger door open. The girl opened her eyes, looking up at Hopper with confusion. She looked tired.

"Jane," she whispered to Hopper. He stopped his movements, looking down at the girl with a little more interest. He yanked the girl out, placing her on the ground and putting his hands on her shoulders.

"How do you know that name?" he asked her in a stern voice. She blankly stared at him before falling backwards onto the snow. Hopper growled, moving up from the wet ground and back to the car. He slide his side door open, looking into the back of the van. The large man on the other side pulled a Mohawk boy from his seat. The kid stood in his spot, looking around in a daze. He looked to the back of the van, someone laid on the floor of the van. He jumped inside, the smoke growing larger. He coughed as he grabbed the girl; she let out a scream as he pulled on her arms to take her out of the smoking vehicle. He threw her onto the ground with a hefty sigh. She cried out in pain, making Hopper stop to pay attention to her; suddenly realizing she was the girl he had taken a bullet out of.

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She hadn't been sleeping for long when she felt a hand bunch up her shirt on her stomach. She let her eyes drift open, forgetting that she had been in a car, her head resting on Mikes lap, her body hurting from the accident. She looked around the back seat, looking up at Mike who had fallen asleep. His hand was resting on her stomach, his fist squeezing her shirt. She looked down at her dirty feet that were resting on the car door, noticing blood on her pants. She grabbed Mike's hand, trying to remove it from her shirt while she slowly sat up.

"You're awake," she heard Nancy's voice say quietly. El looked over to the front of the car; Nancy had her body turned in the front seat looking at her. She lifted her hand to El's face; El winced as Nancy touched something above her left eyebrow. "The cut doesn't look to bad, but it's swollen." El nodded her head at Nancy, looking over to the woman next to her.

Her mouth was dry, and something didn't feel right; something deep in her gut was falling and she didn't know what. She looked over to Mike; his head was resting on the window as he slept. She sighed with relief that she was at least with someone that felt like home to her.

"Are you okay honey," the woman in the front seat said. El glanced over to her, meeting her eyes in the rear view mirror. She could see it, Mike's eyes in hers and she knew then; she was in the car with his family.

She didn't answer the woman, not really sure on what her answer should be. All she really wanted to do was cry. She wanted to punch her pillow in her room and listen to Hopper walk around the cabin in loud stomps. She wanted to hug the teddy bear he had given her, feel the love that went into his name as she thought of Sarah. She wanted to sit in her room with the door closed, looking at her snow globe, wishing she could live in such a bit castle that was all her own.

"I'll be stopping soon," Mike's mom said, "I know I shouldn't but I need to call Tedd." El watched as Nancy and her mom looked at one another in the front seat. "He's probably having a conniption over what's happening." Nancy let out a sigh, and El sat back in her seat, looking out her side of the window, watching the trees thin out slowly as a city came into view. Lines of houses started to appear, taller buildings after that. They had been driving for so long, and El had no idea what direction they were going.

"Where are we," she finally asked, looking at the big sky scrapers ahead of them.

"Indianapolis," Nancy said. El nodded her head like she knew what that meant, but she had never heard the word before. "We have some family that lives here, and since mom didn't grab money before leaving we're going to have to stop and stay with them." El felt her stomach drop. She didn't want to do that; she didn't want to meet anyone new. She looked back out the window as they got onto a ramp, the car speeding up as they got on the high way, circling around the city. She could feel a panic start to build, her leg was hurting, her head was hurting, and unfortunately her left shoulder was starting the flare up.

"Hey," she felt a hand on her left arm, her head snapped to the side. Mike was looking at her with concerned eyes, slightly groggy from sleep. "What's wrong?" he asked her, scooting a little closer. She looked him in the eye not really sure what to say. She was starting to feel overwhelmed. She wanted Hopper there, she wanted to be back

in the cabin with the window shades down, and the door locked. She wanted to hide.

"Hey," Mike said again, pulling her back into focus. "It's going to be okay," he unbuckled his seatbelt, turning his body towards her and putting both hands on her shoulders.

"Michael," his mom hissed, but Mike ignored her. He got closer to El, her breath hitching in her chest, because she couldn't breathe as her mind spiraled to what was happening.

"We're going to figure it out," Mike said to her quietly. "We'll get you cleaned up, and make sure you're okay, and then we're going to figure it out. If this past year has taught us anything it's that we can get out of sticky situations." She could feel tears in her eyes, she didn't really know what that last part meant, but she dropped her head to look at her lap.

"Sticky?" she asked him in a thick voice.

"Yeah," he said with a slight smile, "a sticky situation. It's like a moment in time that isn't that great. At this moment we aren't having a great time, it's complicated and scary; it's sticky." El looked up at him, letting tears fall from her eyes. "It's a sticky situation, but like we have always done before; we will figure it out, okay?" They looked at one another; Mike whipped the tears from her cheeks as she closed her eye, nodding her head. "Hopper's going to be okay," he continued, "He's probably with Ms. Byers and the others at her house, smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee." El gave him a small smile, as she pictured Hopper with Joyce sitting on the front porch.

"Yeah," she said through a slight sob in her voice. She sniffled her nose, letting her tears fall. She was so tired; so done with it all. She was done with the fact that she had powers, she was done with the bad men, she was done with being Eleven. She looked back down at her hands, lifting her sleeve to look at her tattoo on her arm. She frowned at it, wanting to rip her skin off and throw it out the window. Mike's hand left her shoulder covering the tattoo. She looked back up at him with sad eyes; his forehead coming forward to rest on hers.

"I promise," He said to her, "that one day, this will just be a memory. It'll be a story you tell when people ask who you are and who you used to be." She closed her eyes, thinking about what kind of future she could have. Her thirteen year old brain couldn't wrap itself around that fact that she could be older. That one day she would be an adult. "You'll be able to say that you live a normal life, and that you made it through this sticky situation." El opened her eyes, Mike look right back at her, his forehead on hers.

"Promise," she said through a hushed voice.

"Promise," he said back. She took her head away from his, turning to look out the front window. His mother's eyes were moving from the road back to the rearview mirror to look at them. Nancy turned in her seat to look back, nodding her head at El in agreement to what was said.

"We're almost there," His mother said into the silence of the car. "Why don't you guys put seat belts on?" They both settled back into their seats, strapping themselves in as she exited the highway.

El looked up at the big white house that stood in front of her. She watched Mike's mom step out of the car, Nancy following behind. She looked over to Mike who looked at her and then his mother. She didn't know if she should get out of the car. People always looked at her like she was a weirdo, and with the way she was presented at this moment would just make things worse. Mike's mom bent down into the car again, looking right at El.

"Why don't you and Mike stay here for a minute?" El nodded her head, looking back out the window. Nancy stood in the grass, looking at her with a small smile. "I'll get you some clean clothes, and hopefully we can figure out what to do from here." El looked over to Mike, he slowly took off his seat belt, opening the door and stepping out. She watched as he slowly approached his mom, giving her a quick hug. He said something to her, but it was too much of a muffle for her to hear.

Mike had gotten so tall over the past year; he almost sat eye level to his mother. She kissed the side of his head before closing her car door, Mike taking a seat back next to her. For some reason she felt

awkward, like she was missing out on something that she didn't know she needed. Mike closed his door, his mother and Nancy walking to the front porch.

"Did you need anything?" Mike asked her after a couple of moments in the stillness in the car. She wanted a lot of things, mostly just a shower and her own bed. She really wanted some eggos, and at least two days of sleep if it was at all possible. She wanted to know what he said to his mom, and she wanted to know what it was like to have a mom.

"What did you say to her?" she asked, turning sideways in her seat to look at him. She crossed her legs, letting her hands rest in her lap.

"Oh um," Mike turned towards her, resting his right leg on the seat. "I told her that I loved her," he said shyly. "She doesn't really know what's going on right now, and I know she's really worried about Holly." El thought about that word; love. She had heard it before. She had watched people on shows say it to one another, but most of the time it ended with a romantic kiss. She scrunched up her eyes in confusion, not really sure if she was understanding the word. Why would he say something like that to his mother?

"Love?" she said looking up at him. He raised his eyebrows at her. They stared at one another for a moment, as she watched Mike blankly stare at her.

"Do you know what love is?" He asked her.

"I think so," she said back. She thought about his question; did she know what love was? "You say it to people you like, a lot." She thought about the last movie she had watched, I Love You Again. "Larry says it to Kay." She said to Mike. He looked at her in confusion.

"Who's Larry?" he said. She thought about the movie, how Larry really is a bad guy, at least before his amnesia.

"Larry," she said, trying to think of the story line. She hadn't really told a story before; at least not a long one. She looked down at her dirty feet; there was a rip in her pants, dried blood on her leg. "It's

from a movie," she said. Mike looked at her in understanding. He nodded his head.

"Love can be more than romantic," Mike said to her. "I told my mom I love her because I do, even if she drives me crazy." He laughed a little at himself. "I'm sure you might feel the same for Hopper in a way." He looked at her, waiting for her to say something back, but she couldn't. She thought about how Hopper dragged her out of the van, how he cut her out of the bed. *Don't do anything stupid*; that was the last thing he said to her.

"I have to go back," El said quietly. She let her feet fall to the car floor as she looked out her window again. She grabbed the door handle, opening up the car to the chill. She let her feet hit the cold pavement, Mike yelling her name from the back of the car. He got out on his side, coming around the car and grabbing her arm.

"We're not going anywhere," Mike said to her, standing in her way. "Hopper made me promise to keep you safe," El looked him in the eye. She didn't like being told what to do. "No," Mike said putting his hands on either arm, rubbing them up and down. "Don't give me that look; we aren't going anywhere. You need new clothes, some shoes, and at least one meal before you decide what is going on." El huffed, not really in the mood to be mad. She felt slightly light headed, maybe from getting out of the car so fast.

"Where ever you go," Mike continued, "I go. That's going to be the deal for now on. You can't just run off whenever you feel like it." El nodded her head, liking that deal more than being on her own. She let him guide her back into the back of the car; he looked over his shoulder to see if anyone was watching. She moved all the way down, letting him get in after her. He slammed the door behind him, looking more serious as time went by. "Why did you leave," he asked turning back to her. She looked at him in confusion. "At the cabin you promised you weren't going to do anything dangerous, and then you did."

El could feel her heart sink slightly. She felt bad, because she knew she didn't really have much of a choice. She had to get out of there; it was almost like she was driven out. She thought about the day she walked to the quarry on her own, how she felt like she needed a

moment to escape. She thought about how she wanted to swim, how she didn't want to be trapped anymore. Everything made her feel closed in, like she was being suffocated not only by her surroundings, but by the people around her too.

"I had to go," she said to him. She slouched in her seat, pulling up memories of just a month ago, when she left on her own to Chicago. That almost felt like another life time from now. "For a while, I thought I would never leave." There was stillness in the car, she didn't look over to Mike, but knew he was listening. "He always said soon, but it was never happening, and then one day I couldn't take it anymore, so I left." She looked out her window; staring down the street as rows of the same looking houses filled her view. The sun was starting to set, and she didn't know where the day had gone. "It was like the lab, but different." She looked over to Mike, hoping he would understand.

"The girl that got shot," Mike said, "is she from Chicago?" EL looked over to him, forgetting that she had left the girl behind.

"No," El said quietly, slightly perking up in her seat. "No, she's from somewhere else." She put her hands to her eyes, rubbing them as she tried to remember what Tory was like before she left her. She thought the girl was going to die when she saw her that morning. El let out a heavy sigh; why did she have to follow Will? She would have never run into Brenner, she wouldn't be here at this moment; she would be home with the same four walls she had been looking at all year.

"Where is she from," Mike pressed on. She looked over at him, for some reason she was feeling slightly annoyed by the situation. She didn't need a babysitter, and she didn't need Mike to watch over her. She felt like everyone was under estimating her, treating her like a small child when in actuality she could take care of everything herself.

"I don't want to talk about it," She said flatly. "How long?" She asked looking out his window. His mother and Nancy had been gone for at least ten minutes.

"I don't know," Mike said looking over to the front door. "My aunt

Char loves asking questions, and I know my mom has to call Hopper as well. I'm sure we can find real clothes to fit you though, I have a cousin that's around your size." EL nodded her head, wondering what a cousin was, but had no real interest to ask. "I'm sure we won't stay here though," Mike continued, "after my mom calls Hopper I'm sure the lab people will have someone come out here. I'm sure they have Wills phone bugged, I know they bugged ours a long time ago." El looks at him in confusion, not quite sure what that meant. At that moment Nancy came out of the front door, running down the steps and opening Mike's car door.

"Let's get inside," She said to them. "Mom called Hopper but there was no answer. We are all going to take a shower and get some food. Maybe stay the night." Mike looked over to El, her stomach slightly dropping.

"What did you tell Aunt Char?" Mike asked starting to move out of the car.

"Well mom still doesn't know the full story; she just said we found a girl on the side of the road and that we are trying to get her home." El looked down at her clothes, not moving from her seat. She almost felt embarrassed, something she didn't really know about. She could feel her cheeks heating up, looking back at the house. A family that probably had never seen a kid like her, looking so bad.

"El," Mike said from his open door. "You and I can share a room. Let's get inside before the sun goes down and it really gets cold." EL hesitated before opening the door to her side of the car. She slammed it as hard as she could, moving to the front of the house. Mike took the lead following his sister. El looked behind her, looking up and down the street before following up the steps and through the front door.

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Mike watched as his sister led El upstairs. El had a slight limp in her right leg, a slump in her shoulders, and the dark lines around her eyes were still visible. El looked back at him as he watched her go. She followed Nancy to the bathroom, and Mike looked around the house to figure out what he should do.

He could hear his aunt in the kitchen down the hall. She talked loudly to her mother about social services, and his mother refusing to give them a call. He sighed, following their voices while looking at the pictures that hung along the wall. He hadn't seen his family in almost a year. His cousins looked a little bigger in the new family picture that hung on the wall; Catherin was his age, but they never really got along that well.

He stepped into the kitchen, looking at his mother as she leaned against the counter, her sister slightly shorter smoking a cigarette by the open window above the sink.

"Michael," his aunt Char said. "You've gotten so big." Mike looked down at himself and then over to his mom. She had a glint of worry in her eyes as they stared at one another. "So, where's this girl," his aunt asked.

"Upstairs with Nans," Mike said, "She's going to take a shower really fast." He looked over to the phone that sat on the wall next to him. He thought about Hopper, how he wanted them to call; he said he would be there. He picked the phone up from the receiver, punching in Will's number.

"I already tried Mike," His mom said. He didn't listen as he put the phone to his ear. He listened to the first ring, hearing a slight click over the silence before there was a second and then a third. He frowned at the clicking noise; taking the phone from his ear and looking down at it.

"Did you call dad from this phone?" he asked turning around to look at his mom. He felt his stomach fill with butterflies.

"Yes," his mom said, popping herself off from the counter, slowly moving closer to him.

"And what did you tell him," Mike asked.

"Just that we were here and we would be home tomorrow," Mike took the phone in his hand and slammed it back onto the wall. They needed to leave, they needed to go. He rubbed his hands on his jeans, sweat building up from nervousness. He didn't know where to go, or

what to do. All he did know was that the click was them listening in, they were listen in on Hawkins, and now they knew where they were. "Mike," his mom said from behind him. He turned back to her feeling the panic build up.

"I think we should go," he said as calmly as he could. He looked over to his aunt slightly, her faces confused as she took a breath of her cigarette. His mom got closer to him. "I think we should go," he said looking into his moms eyes. She took the keys from the counter.

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She had a gash in her right leg, and the cut above her left eyebrow was throbbing in pain as she let the hot water run over it. Everything hurt, but that didn't matter because she was in a hot shower. She watched as the dirt fell off of her, listening to Nancy move on the other side of the shower curtain. She didn't want to get out of the shower, but she could feel her stomach growl and yell as she slowly began to realize how tired and hungry she really was.

"I have all the band aides and cotton balls we need to patch you up," Nancy said. "Are you almost done?" El turned off the water, grabbing the towel that hung from the shower rod; covering up her body as she stepped out. Nancy handed her her under garments and turned around giving El some privacy. She put on a pair of jeans; she had never worn pants that had fit her so perfectly. She slipped on a tight flannel shirt, some socks and a pair of vans. The shoes were slightly big, but the closes she had ever worn on her feet. Nancy gave her a smile as she dabbing the cut on her forehead with a gel.

"You look good," Nancy said to her. El looked down at herself with a smile. Her outfit reminded her of someone. She frowned, thinking of her friends.

"Max," she said. Nancy giggled, patting her arm to tell her that she was done with her cut.

"Yeah that does look like something she would wear," There was a knock at the door and they both jumped.

"Hey honey," Nancy mom said on the other side of the door. "Are you

almost done?" Nancy walked over, opening the door to her concerned mother, Mike standing next to her.

"We need to get out of here," Mike said softly. "We need to go now," El walked closer to the door. Mike looked her up and down before handing her a coat, a simple black hooded jacket. She grabbed it and put it on; Mike grabbed her arm and pulled her out of the bathroom as she did.

"What's going on?" Nancy asked.

"They are listening to the phone calls," Mike said to her. El looked up at him in confusion. "Mom called dad and told him where we are, they were probably listening in on what was being said." Nancy and El looked over to his mom, El frowned at her.

"Mom," Nancy said in an annoyed voice. "They bugged those phones forever ago." She rolled her eyes, looking down the hall way.

"I want to know what's going on," His mom said, pointing her car keys at all of them. "I'm not leaving here until you tell me what's happening." Mike gave a heavy sigh, trying to grab the keys out of her hand. She raised them above her head dangling them from her finger. Her and Mike had a stare off, one El new well. It was like watching her and Hopper communicate.

El looked up at the keys. Being the shortest one there she knew she would never be able to reach them. She felt a tug on her brain as she tried to lift the keys from her finger, a slight pain erupting in the front of her head. She blinked, concentrating, watching as the keys gave a slight jingled as they lifted from her finger. She let them drop, catching them in midair. She felt warm blood running from her nose, pulling the sleeve from her shirt to wipe it away.

Mike's mom looked over to her in shock. Nancy looked over to Mike, who for a moment didn't know what to say. He looked at the keys in her hand, grabbing them from her and showed them to his mom. He gave a slight nodded down the hall to tell them to follow.

"I don't think so," his mom said grabbing his shoulder.

"I think this conversation is better left for the car," Mike hissed as his mother. "Trust me." His mom glanced at El once more, taking a step away from her. El looked down in embarrassment, checking her nose to make sure all the blood was gone.

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Hopper watched as Jonathan dabbed the cut on his mother's face. She winced; grabbing hold as Wills hand as he slept. They decided to make the long walk back to the cabin; the closest place to where they were left in the middle of the street. There had been long arguments on the way there as the kids from the tan van yelled at one another. The girl that got shot passed out in the large man's arms, as the girl driver of the van helped carry the other girl. One arm around her shoulder, while the guy with the Mohawk had the other. Hopper looked into the small kitchen, four young adults standing around awkwardly. They had placed the two girls in El's bed, both with bloodied noses and cut up bodies.

The sun had gone down hours ago, and there had been no sign of Dustin and Lucas by the time they had made their way back. Hopper put his hands to his face, trying to figure out the next step, was there a next step? He didn't know how he was going to get in contact with El, he didn't know what he was going to tell Joyce about Will, and even though he didn't want to he had to make it back to the quarry to see what El had opened.

Steve pulled one of the wooden chairs from the small dinner table, looking over to the punks with a glare. Hopper gave him a small nod as they looked at one another. Hopper stood from his seat on the couch, walking to El's room to look through the door way; both girls still asleep in El's bed.

"Is that Kali?" Hopper asked looking to the group in the kitchen. They all looked at one another, no sure what they could say. "Why did you hit the van? Was it on purpose, or are you guys just stupid." They all glared at him; he stepped a little closer to the group. "Look, we're all stuck here so you might as well open your mouths and tell me what's going on."

"We came for Jane," the small blonde mousy girl said. "They were

hopping she could help."

"Help with what?" Hopper asked, crossing his arms. The group of misfits looked at him, not sure if they should say more. "Look, Jane, El is like my daughter. She means a lot to all of us," Hopper motioned to everyone in the room. "If we want to get out of this situation I think you should start talking." Silence filled the room, making Hopper feel the heat from his anger rise above his head.

"We have been after these people for years," the Mohawk said. "When Jane showed up we thought it was a miracle. She could find them so easily. Once she left, Kali was mad; she was more intense on finding these men. I don't know how, but she found out about Tory, and we went to break her out. They wanted El's help to find more; to make sure that no one else was suffering." Hopper turned his head to Steve who lifted his eyebrows at him. He turned to look at Joyce; she slowly looked up at him placing Will's hand in her lap.

"I don't think you guys know what you have walked into," Hopper said looking back at them. "There's more to this than just some bad lab guys that deserve some revenge." They all looked at one another in confusion.

"Do you think she opened it," Steve said standing from his chair. "That crack at the quarry, was that it?" Hopper rubbed his forehead; he looked into El's room, looking at the girls on the bed. His daughters teddy bear laid on the floor face down on the wood. He walked in and picked it up, looking into the bears eyes.

He thought back to the day; watching as the dark cloud circled around Will and El. He thought about the needle that was shoved into El; the black liquid, something he had never seen before. He placed the bear onto of El's book shelve, walking back out into the living room. He looked over to Will, watching as Joyce brushed his hair out of his eyes. Jonathan made eye contact with him, his eyebrows coming together with concern.

"Has he not woken up once?" Hopper asked moving around the couch to look over Will.

"The last time that, thing," Joyce said looking at Hopper; tears in her

eyes. Not from sadness, but anger raged inside of her. "The last time this happened, he was awake like nothing happened. He felt a little off, but he was awake."

"He did fall into some frozen water," Steve said from the table. "When I pulled him up he wasn't awake, but I thought that had something to do with water in his lungs."

"Maybe it was the accident," Jonathan said. "I mean the van was flipped on its side. Do you think it's his head?" Hopper looked down at Will; his eyes dark, his skin pale.

"I think we need to get back to that quarry," Hopper looked over to Steve. "We'll take my truck," he pointed to the young adults in the kitchen. "Can I trust you not to do anything, at all?" They all looked at one another. A few of them nodded their heads and Hopper let out a strong breath. "I'm only trusting you because of El," Hopper said, "Make sure you check her bandages," he said pointing into El's room. His eyes enlarged thinking about the night before, Him and Dustin patching the girls bullet wound. "There were two boys here," He said.

"Dustin and Lucas?" Steve asked. Both him and Steve looked at the crew.

"They were here when we left," the bigger guy said. "We didn't do anything but intrude and take the girl." Hopper watched as Steve let a breath out.

"They probably went home," Hopper said to him. He patted the guy on his shoulder ushering him out the door, taking one last glance at Joyce. "This could be like last time," He said to her. Her eyes widened. "Just make sure he doesn't know where he is if he wakes up," Joyce looked down at Will putting her hands on his forehead as Hopper shut the front door.

He decided to park his truck by the trail where he had found El a few weeks ago. It was a ten minute walk to the quarry and he didn't want anyone to see his truck out in the open. They were trying to go unseen, at least for now.

"How did you figure out where we were?" Hopper asked Steve as they

walked. Steve swung his car keys on his figure, both slightly slipping on mud patches as the snow melted.

"I radioed your emergency radio station you had given me, channel eleven. Dustin told me that you had left after the kids, and what way you guys had gone. I guess my brain decided to have a smart moment and I took a good guess on where you were being led to." Steve shrugged his shoulders. Hopper took a glance around him, seeing no sigh of anyone else.

"Why was Mrs. Wheeler with you?" Hopper looked over to the kid; he had a large gun in one hand.

"She called the station; I think she was looking for you. The lab people showed up to her house. The gray haired guy was looking for Nancy and Mike. I rushed over knowing something had to be going on since you were late for work." Hopper let out a grumble, not wanting to think about what he was going to say for his disappearance. He didn't work Saturdays often, but they were usually their busy days.

They let silence play between them for the rest of the way; both looking around them every so often to see if anyone was following them. By the time they were able to see the trees thinning out, Steve's car still in the dirt path way, they were out of breath. They couldn't see anyone in sight, but didn't want to take any chances. They slowly peaked their heads out of the trees, moving slowly around the rock hills to get to the front of the water. A large crack ran up the side of the tall rock wall. Black ivy crawly from the hole that was made in the rock; dropping down into the water.

Hopper looked around the quarry, not seeing anything weird other the crack in the wall. He heard a droplet of water ring in his ears; he looked out into the ice water. The hole that El and Will fell into was still there, large blocks of ice breaking off from the point. The water lifted slightly, as if pulsing, as large wave came into the middle of the ice hole cause water to splash up slightly in the middle of the small lake. The ice cracking.

There was a slightly red glow, illuminating the water as another pulse raised a wave. Hopper looked over to Steve who let a gulp run

down his throat in disbelief.

"I think she opened something," Steve said. A wave finally reached their feet, the cold water rushing into their shoes. "I don't think we should be here," Steve said. A large pulse went through the water again, the red glow getting a little brighter, the wave a little bit bigger. They both slowly backed up, not able to take their eyes off of what they were seeing. The wave of water followed them, so they starting to move faster. "I really think we should go," Steve said through a panicked voice.

"Yeah," Hopper said under his breath. They turned, moving to Steve's car in a rush. A pulse rumbled the ground as they starting to run, both opening the car doors in haste. Hopper got in the passenger seat, watching as the waves got bigger. Steve turned the car in top speed, flying out of the mud and rock to get back to the high way.

"We should probably get El back right," Steve said turning quickly onto a main road. "Like, who else is going to take care of this? She closed it last time, she could close it ago." There was a moment of silence in the car as the sped down the road. The sun was beginning to set, and the darkening of the trees was starting to freek Hopper out. "How do we even get in contact with her, where did they end up going? I can only think of a few places that Nancy has talked about, but what if they decided to stay off the grid."

"How about we have a moment of silence kid," Hopper said to him. "Just let me think for a second. Go to the Byers, they have a phone and that's where I told the Wheelers to call." Steve shook his head, speeding faster down the road. Hopper listened to the air hit the car, rocks and mud still falling from the car tires. He looked out his side mirror, not seeing anything out of the ordinary.

By the time they got back to the Byers house the drive way was empty, the sky was dark, and there were still a few lights on from the night before. They walked to the front door, the phone was ringing as they climbed the porch steps. Hopper ran inside, picking up the phone to hear the dial tone. He had missed the call by a second.

"Maybe they'll call back," Steve said as Hopper slammed the phone down. He looked around the house, refusing to let tears drop from his

eyes.

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"Now what," Mikes mom said as they sat in his aunts drive way. "Are you going to tell what's happening now?" Mike let out a sigh of frustration. His sister looked over to him from the front seat, trying to find any sign of approval.

"Fine, I'll tell the story," she said after a couple of seconds. Nancy began to talk while Mike looked over to El. She played with her hands as she looked out the window. Nancy mentioned the word lab and experiments, El looked down at herself. He felt his heart break slightly, reaching his hand out to her, but she ignored him.

It took Nancy fifteen minutes to move through the rushed story, his mom sitting in her seat with her mouth wide open. Once Nancy shut her mouth the car remained in silence as his mother took in all the information.

"I'm sorry," His mom said quietly, "but why?" she said a little louder. "Why wouldn't you tell me?" she yelled at them. EL jumped in her seat slightly, Mike felt ashamed and anger all at once. "How many times have I told you, you can tell me anything?" Nancy looked over to Mike, they both said nothing. "This would fall under the anything category." El slumped in her seat, letting out a huffed breath.

"We go back," El said quietly. All three of them look at her. "We go back, because they need us." She looked at Mike with hard eyes. He stared back not sure what to say.

"If we did go back," His mom began to say.

"We go back," El interrupted in a hardened voice. Mike watched as El and his mom glared at one another. "Take me back," Mike looked over to his mom with a small plea to just listen to her, but at the same time he didn't want to go back. He was perfectly content with going anywhere else but home.

"Fine," his mom said, "but if anything happens that's on you. Hopper told me to get out of there, but I'm only going back for my kids."

Mike gulped down, looking over to El who sat slump in her seat. The cut on her forehead looking better, but the darkness around her eyes looking the same.

He knew she didn't have the energy for anything to big. She could barely get the keys off of his mother's fingers. He looked out his own window, watching as the car started forward, towards the storm that was beginning to churn in Hawkins.

11. Chapter 11

She sees it all again, as she sits in the back of their beat up van. She looks over Tory for only a few moments when Ray push's her out of the way to take a look at her shoulder. Tory's face was dark, her eyes sinking into her skull.

"I'm taking off," Mick said from the front seat. Kali looked around the back, all of them breathing heavy making the area too warm. She moved to her usually spot in the passenger seat; looking ahead at the trees as Mick turned on the car. "Where are we going," Mick asked her. Kali shook her head.

"We need to find Jane," kali said. She thought of the night before. The bad men where crawling everywhere, and with Jane out of her sights she was scared she couldn't protect her. "Just give me a minute to figure it out." She could feel the van roll slowly. Mick tried to turn the vehicle around while the rest of the team remained quiet. Kali heard a pain hissing sound from the back; Ray's muffled voice following after. Mick stayed close to the tree line, giving them the sight of the paved road.

"I vote we leave this town," Axel said from behind. "I'm sorry Kali, but is she really worth all this trouble?" Kali let out a frustrated breathe, focusing on her breathing rather than the complaining of the group. Mick was saying something beside her, but all she could hear were distant muffled voices as she closed her eyes; letting them fall back open to the darkened wet floors of the void.

"She's not here," Kali turned fast, the water on the floors rippling around her. Tory stood; her face pale, her eye tired. Kali tried to ignore her, looking past the girl to see if anything was in the distance. She could see anything around her. It was all really new, she never really went into this place on her own, but now that she tried to focus she realized that this place could be useful.

"We just need to concentrate," Kali said, looking back to Tory. She focused on her breathing, thinking of Jane; how she looked, how she talked. They sat in silence for a long moment, only hearing Tory's feet as she shuffled back and forth. It almost felt as if Kali was moving fast, the muffled sound of wind hitting the car as they rolled down the high way.

She looked around her, noticing a shape take form in the distance.

"You can try all you want," the voice echoed from far away. Kali looked over to Tory, not waiting for her as she moved forward. She walked fast to the shaped, a man standing hunched over a medical bed." You won't be able to use any power until your medicine wears off." Kali came closer; she could hear Tory's faint steps behind her. El lay strapped to a bed, her eyes darker than she had ever seen.

"They would sedate me," Tory said, coming to stand beside Kali. They looked at one another

"I know what to do," Kali said before everything started to disappear.

Kali took in a sharp breath, a sharp pain coming into her rib cage as she felt a pinch on her lung. She looked around the small room, feeling her head throb as she tried to figure out where she was. She could hear raspy breathing next to her; she looked to her right to see Tory lying like the dead. She felt like her lungs were drowning, as she let in a breath with effort. She sat up straight trying to gain control on her breathing, dragging her feet to the floor.

She could hear soft whispers outside of the open door way. She could see Axel sitting at the table from where she was sitting. She let herself stand, her right leg wobbling as she tried to contain the pain in her knee. She looked back at Tory, her eyes still closed, her breathing coming out wet.

"You're up," Kali jumped, looking to see Mick in the door way. She stood with her arms crossed over her chest, her hair still holding a little bit of glass in it. She moved forward, limping slightly to the door way. She looked past her friend, a woman sat with a young boy. She looked up to make eye contact with her, the woman's eyes watering as the older boy stood over her, his hand on her shoulder.

"What happened?" Kali asked, looking around the small cabin. "How did we get back here?" She looked to her friends, all of them looking at her with no emotion.

"You don't remember?" Mick asked. Kali shook her head, looking around the room. "You made me hit the vans. You made us get in a

car accident."

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"I just feel like something is more off than we think it is," Lucas said. He sat on top of the fire wood hut outside of Max's window, his pants slightly damp from the wood. Max sat with her window open, her back to the wall looking at her bedroom door. "I mean they never came back, and then those punk teenagers came in and just took that girl." Lucas was greeted with more silence. The sun had gone down hours ago, and after explaining to his parents that he went out for a snowball war that morning they just shrugged their shoulders. He snuck out of his window once he heard his parents go to bed. "Are you okay?" He asked her, looking over the window sill to see the top of her red head.

"Yeah," she said faintly. Rock music rang from the room next to hers, the sound of her stepfather coming from the living room. Lucas hadn't been paying attention much to his surroundings; he was more concentrated on telling his story.

"DO you want to get out of here," he asked her, looking over to her bedroom door. She looked up at him, and then looked around her room. She stood from her spot, moving to her bed and stuffing her pillows under her blanket. She walked over to her closet, pulling out her backpack, a large coat and some extra clothes. Lucas looked away, not wanting to invade some sort of privacy. He looked out to the trees, thinking about Mike, if he was still out there with El, and if Will was okay.

His felt a tap on his shoulder, looking up to see Max looming over the window. He jumped down from the wood hut; she turned around turning off her light before climbing out of her window and jumping from the hut. He considered his options on where they could go. He thought of the Byers, if they ever made it home, and if the lab men were still out in full force.

"Do you mind my place?" he asked, jumping onto his bike. Max shrugged her shoulders, hopping on the back.

"Any where's better than here," She put her arms around his waist as

he began to peddle. He laughed in his head for the fact that just a year ago if would blow his mind that Mike was keeping a girl in his basement. Now he peddled fast down the road, his face becoming numb to the cold, as he brought a girl home in the dead of night.

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Hopper slumped on the couch. He felt like he hadn't slept in two days, his neck was tense, and there was a slight ringing in his ears that made him think that maybe El's screams were louder than he thought. Hopper and Steve sat in the living room, all the light were off, and they were trying to lay low for the night. Hopper thought maybe the phone would ring again, but it had been hours since, and the feeling of disappointment was starting to wash over him.

He had let El leave. He threw he into the back of a car with the Wheeler kid and said *don't do anything stupid*. He mentally wanted to smack himself, because for a while now he has meant to say something else to her, but could never get the nerve to say it. He only had her for a daughter for a few days and he had already did the biggest screw up a dad could do; he left her.

"Do you think the Wheelers made it okay?" Steve asked from the other side of the room. He held his bat in his hands, lazily swinging it back and forth with his back against the wall.

"I hope so," Hopper said quietly. "I'm more worried about what El might do with the Wheelers. Karen doesn't really have a handle on keeping those kids in check." He thought about Mike's big mouth. How the kid couldn't keep one emotion from going astray; how Nancy was constantly sneaking out at night to see Jonathan.

"She tries," Steve says. "From what I've seen she really wants to try." The room fell to silence again as they sat in the darkness. Hopper let his gun slip to the floor, glancing up at the ceiling and thinking about Joyce. He left her there with Will, with no indication on what to do. He let his hand scrub his face; he was mad at himself. He was getting to old for this, a life of running around and fighting actual monsters.

"Maybe we do need El here," Hopper said lightly. "I mean, did you get a good look at that thing? It was almost like the water was

breathing."

"Is that what they gate looked like before," Steve asked. He could hear the kid let the bat fall. He thought back to two months ago; a life time ago. The gate had been big, pulsating. It beat like a heart.

"Yeah," Hopper said, "I guess it did kind of look like that." Steve let out a quiet curse; the floor on the porch let out a creak. Hopper sat up straight, grabbing his gun from the floor and looking over to Steve: his bat ready in his hands. Hopper stood in silence, slowly walking to the front door as small footsteps continued on the other side of the door. Hopper undid the chain lock slowly, Steve coming up behind him as he got his gun ready; pointed at the door. He slowly cracked it open, letting his gun look out first before he checked out of the small crack of the door.

Dustin stood with his hands up; his hat was low on his face, the speaker of his walkie around his neck. Hopper let out a frustrated sigh as he widened the door, Steve letting out a breath of air as he let his bat fall.

"Why are you here?" Hopper said, grabbing Dustin's shirt and dragging him inside. "Isn't your mother parenting you at all?"

"She fell asleep on her chair," He said shrugging his shoulders. He looked behind Hopper at Steve. "What are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same thing." Steve said back, coming closer to drag Dustin to the couch. "Don't you know how late it is? I can't cover for you every time you sneak out of your house. Your mom is going to think I'm some creep or something."

"I'll just tell her I went to Mike's or something," Dustin said looking up at him. Hopper cleared his throat, pushing the boy onto the couch before closing the door and locking it back up. "Where is Mike," Dustin said looking around the dark room.

"A lot has happened," Hopper said. He looked at the walkie talkie set up that Dustin had going on. A cord reached to his hip where his walkie was set, a microphone around his neck. "Does Mike have one of those?" Hopper asked, picking at his microphone.

"Well yeah," Dustin said taking the microphone from Hopper. "But they're not really pocket sized, I don't think he would have it on him unless he had his backpack."

"How far do they reach?" Hopper asked.

"Not as far as you think. I know Will can barely reach Mikes house from here, but Lucas can defiantly get a signal from him."

"Huh," Hopper said. Steve walked over to his spot on the wall, dragging his back against it until he sat on the floor. Dustin looked around the dark house; items littered the floor from the night before. "What happened to Lucas?" Hopper walked around the room slowly, he looked out the windows; checking for anything weird.

"I don't know," Dustin said leaning back on the sofa, his bag on his back deflating. "He went home, and then after dinner I tried to call over this," Dustin pointed at his radio placed on his waste, "but he never answered." There was a pause in the room. "Where's El?" he asked looking over to Hopper. Hopper made a fist with his hands, looking over to Dustin in annoyance.

"As I said," Hopper said in a low voice. "It's a long story."

"We might be here a while," Dustin said back taking off his bag and placing it on the floor next to him. Hopper rubbed his temples, looking over to Steve who was trying not to fall asleep.

"Isn't it past your bed time or something?" Hopper said. "Aren't you tired?"

"Every time I close my eyes I see blood," Dustin said looking down at his hands. "Last night was crazy."

"Yes well," Hopper let out a awkward cough moving to sit down next to him. "It's been a crazy day."

...

El sat cross legged in her seat as they flew down the high way. The sun had gone down forever ago, and she felt like they should be almost home. She looked over to Mike who slept with his head

against the door, Nancy doing the same in the passenger seat. El looked out her window, picking at her nails as they drove in silence. The sound on the wind hitting the car was making her sleepy, but she refused to close her eye until she saw Hopper and home.

She only let her eye fall for a second, focusing on the whoosh of the wind outside her window. She felt the rhythm of the wheels, as they hit small pot holes. She focused on her breathing, taking in slow breaths and letting the beating of her heart take control of her entire body. She realized then what she was trying to do, knowing that Hopper had told her many times that she shouldn't go into the void, but she wanted to know what was happening back home, and she wanted to make sure they were okay.

"It's been a long day," She heard Hoppers voice in her right ear. She turned her head to the noise, only to see darkness because she wasn't in the void. "Right now we just wait," Hopper said in her left ear. She kept her eyes closed; still trying to force her into the void, but it wasn't working. "Will took us all the way to the quarry." Hoppers voice was dying out. El let out a frustrated breath as she felt something warm slip onto the top of her lip. She opened her eyes, rubbing the back of her black jacket onto her upper lip to get rid of the blood.

Whatever Brenner had shot into her was still working. It was hard and straining to do even simple things and worst of all it was getting harder and harder not to freak out. She always had her ability of force when she was in danger, but now they were driving back into the town that held all the bad elements, and it was hard for her to even lift keys.

"I see you," El jumped in her seat, the voice playing deep in her ear. She looked around the cabin of the car, glancing over to Mike who was still fast asleep. Mrs. Wheeler looked at her through the rear view mirror lifting her eye brows.

"Are you okay?" She asked in concern, looking to her and then back to the road.

"Yeah," El lied softly, looking back out of her window. She watched as trees past, and a few puddles splashed up from the melted snow.

"Lier," she heard in her ear again. She put her hand to her ear in confusion. The voice sounded familiar, she knew she had heard it before. She glanced back to Mike, not knowing if she should say something or not.

"Can we stop at the cabin?" El asked lightly looking at Mrs. Wheeler.

"I don't know," Mrs. Wheeler said back, looking over to a sleeping Nancy. "Are there going to be people there?" EL thought about the question.

"Yes," EL said with confidence. She looked back out the window, the Hawkins sign coming into view. "It's close to here." She watched as Mrs. Wheeler nodded her head slowly, not quite sure if she should believe her or not.

...

Mike woke up to the car stopping, confused on where he was and what was happening. He realized he was in Mrs. Byer's car, the memory of the day coming back. He looked to the seat next to him, it was empty. He sat up straight and fast, realizing hr was in front his house, his mother gently pushing Nancy to wake her up.

"Where's El?" Mike said loudly, making both his mother and sister jump in their seats. He looked out the windows to see if she had gotten out, seeing nothing but darkness.

"I dropped her off at the cabin," His mom said. "She said someone should be there." Nancy let out a frustrated sigh as Mike angrily opened his car door. He stepped out of the car, looking down the dark street, scanning the road for any white vans. He felt his heart race as he played Hoppers words back in his head. The chief was going to kill him. Why would El leave? They promised to do this together.

"Let's just get inside," His mom said slamming her car door. Mike looked up to his mom with a mean glare. He followed behind his mother as they walked up to the small doorway porch. He stole a glance at Nancy who looked around their street; scanning just like he had done. "I'm surprised the house hasn't burnt down," His mom said.

Mike rolled his eyes, feeling the warmth of the heater as his mom unlocked the front door and opened it up. He could hear his dad snoring in the living room, the television playing Loony Toon's on blast. "What a great babysitting," His mother sighed as they walked further into the house.

...

El stood in front of the front door of the cabin, listening to multiple footsteps walk back and forth from the inside. She tried focusing on the locks, confused on why it was taking her so long to get a hold of her ability. She had never lived her life without being able to tap into doing whatever she wanted with her mind. She sighed as her closed her fist, lifting it up to the door, hovering as she thought about knocking. She never had to knock on a door, and she had never been the one to give the secret knock. She tapped twice, then three times, letting the last knock come softly as she heard the cabin go quiet.

There was a few seconds of nothing. She looked behind her at the darkness of the forest, feeling eyes on her from the trees. Her breath came out slowly as a fog from her mouth; a few sticks in the distance broke. She searched harder, her eyes squinting at the direction of the noise to her left. The sound of the locks made her turn back around quickly, Jonathan standing on the other side of the door hold an old long brown gun. He let out a heavy sigh.

"El," He said softly before placing the gun against the wall and dragging her into the cabin. She looked around the warm room, the kitchen crowded. She played with the confusion on her face as Kali's crew grinned back at her, kali walking out of the circle of her friends to give El a tight hug.

"I was so worried about you," El stood awkwardly as Kali held her. She wasn't sure if she was mad at Kali or not. She was the reason all this was happening; why the bad men came back to Hawkins.

"What are you doing here?" El asked quietly.

"We came her early to get Tory, as we were leaving we found you with Brenner, so we tried to get you out.

"You hit our van?" El questioned her but already knew the answer was yes. She pulled away from Kali, looking around the rest of the cabin. Her eyes landed on Joyce, her tired eyes looking at her from Hopper's bed; Will lying motionless, his shirt drenched in sweat.

I see you; El looked down thinking of the words that played in her head earlier. She looked back up at Will, walking closer slowly as she tried to take in every detail. His face was pale, his eyes blacked out, his body slightly shaking with each step that she took.

"Where's Hopper?" she asked walking closer to Joyce around the couch.

"He left with Steve a little while ago," Joyce said. "He went to go see what happened at the quarry, maybe take a look around town to see if it's being watched." El thought about the quarry, about the ground rumbling, and the cold water that took over her flesh and lungs. She thought about the black liquid shot into her blood stream as she screamed in a state of panic.

She knelt down next to Will grabbing the hand that Joyce was holding. It got him; she had tried, but it got him.

"He hasn't woken up," Joyce whispered. "He hasn't woken and I don't know what to do." She looked up at Joyce then back over the boy. "Do you think you could talk to him somehow?" El took Joyce's hand out of Will, grasping his hand tightly in between both of her small hands. She looked around the room, everyone watching her as she looked up at the lights shining bright. She stood from her spot, letting Will go as she walked to the light switch, turning the overhead light off, walking into her room to get her bandana.

Her bed was occupied, Tory's breaths coming out more easily than they were that morning. She grabbed her bandana from her bed side table, closing the door quietly as not to wake her. She took the T.V., rolling it over to Will's bed. She turned it on, turning the station manually until she found the static. She turned the volume up, kneeling back to Will, placing the bandana on her forehead before grabbing his hand in her again.

"I can try," EL said. She looked around the room, Kali and her crew

growing closer into the room, Jonathan came to stand over Joyce. "Everyone needs to be quiet." She took one more glance at Will before dropping the bandana over her eyes, taking in deep breaths as she squeezed his hand in hers.

The sound of the Television was slowly getting louder as she tried to concentrate. She could hear her own heart beat as she felt a twitch in Will's hand, causing her flinch slightly. She didn't know how much time had passes, and she tried not to think about it as she tried harder to step into a void to find Will in.

"I see you," she heard the voice say in her right ear. She turned her head to the right, trying to find the voice in the dark. "Do you see me?" She heard it say. She felt Wills hand grip hers, she turned her head back to him as if to look at him. A chill ran through her body, a darkness, just sitting over her should. She felt like something was watching, like the darkness was standing over her.

"Will?" Joyce's voice whispered. She could feel the woman shift on the bed. El slowly lifted the bandana from her eyes. Her eyes landed on Will, his gaze staring at her as he lay still in bed. "Will?" Joyce said leaning over him. El and Will stared at one another; she could feel electricity that felt almost chaotic.

"What are you doing?" he asked her in a raspy voice. El looked up at Joyce not quite sure what to say. "What are you doing?" He said a little bit louder. El jumped slightly trying to take her hand from his, his grip tightened on her.

"Will," she said lowly. She could feel it, a cold rush of air that turned into a gust. It was an energy that sent her backwards, the air getting knocked out of her chest as landed on the her back. She saw Joyce land into corner on top of Jonathan. Will stood up quickly looking down at her.

"I see you," he said deeply, his voice slightly changed. "And I don't want to see you anymore." Wills body landed on top of hers, his hands coming around her neck. She couldn't breathe, and it was as if the sound of her blood was the loudest thing in her ears. She watched as kali got closer, Joyce stood quickly. They both rushed to Will, but he screamed slightly. She watched out of her darkening vision as they

flew backwards, landing against the wall; his grip tightening around her neck. She opened her mouth, trying to bring in air, she couldn't move her arms, she couldn't think. The edges of her vision becoming darker, dots of black playing in the little light she could see. Then as if only a millisecond went by, she was gasping in air as she felt Will get off her body; his hands off of her neck.

"We need something to tie him down," she heard Jonathan's voice say. She coughed, the pain causing a cry to form in her eyes. The light was coming back to her vision, the sound of Will's screams piercing her ears.

"It hurts," She could hear him scream as she realized that she lay on her side, coughing so hard she almost started to vomit. She felt a hand rub her back as she heard everyone's footsteps shuffle around the cabin. There was a loud thud, and Will's screams died down to deep breaths.

"That should hold him a little while." El slowly turned from her side as the coughs died down, she put her hand to her throat, and hand grabbing her wrist.

"Don't touch," she heard Kali say as she sat over her. Kali helped her sit up slowly; Will lie back on the bed, his arms restrained to each corner. The cable to the T.v. holding his right wrist to the bed frame. Tory lay on the floor next to her, out cold. "She made him think his arm was broken." Kali said looking over to Tory's body. "We need to get her back to the bed." Axel came around the couch helping Kali lift Tory from the floor, disappearing into her bedroom.

"Let me take a look," Joyce said sitting down in front of her. She extended her hand to El's throat. She winced as Joyce touched the middle of her throat. She tried to talk but nothing came out. "He might have broken it," she said look her in the eyes. "You're larynx, it helps you talk; among other things." El let her right hand go to her throat regretting the decision quickly. "We need to get ahold of Hopper," Joyce said to Jonathan. Johnathan still stood in the corner, his eyes widened. El swallowed slowly, grinding her teeth in pain as Will let out a small grunt as he tried to pull his arms from the wires and cables that tied him down.

...

Hopper laid on the floor of the Byers living room. He fell asleep for at least an hour before Dustin's snores woke him up. He looked over to Steve who had fallen asleep sitting against the wall, his bat loosely in his grips. He laid, looking at the ceiling, thinking about the beating water on the quarry. He imagined the monsters swimming to the top, and the skies turning red as their town was taken over. He let his imagination get to him, playing the possibility of failing this time in his head. The soft sound of a beep made him loose track on his day dream. He looked over to Dustin, his radio still on and his mic resting on his belly. A few more beeps came, sounding familiar to his ears.

He grabbed the head set from Dustin, startling the boy awake as Hopper put the head phone to his ear. Morris code, he looked around the room for paper; quickly dragging Dustin from his spot on the couch and into the kitchen. Finding a small sticky not on the counter, a pen lying next to it.

"What's going on?" Dustin asked as Hopper shushed him, writing down lines and dots onto the paper. "Help," Dustin said reading to code before Hopper did. "Help where?" Hopper let the head phone fall onto the counter, looking around the kitchen to think.

"The only place people are right now is the cabin." He quickly walked back into the living room, giving Steve a little nudge with his foot and he grabbed his belt from the couch arm. "Rise and shine," Hopper said. He looked to the clock sitting on the wall. It was only eleven thirty but it felt so much later than that. "We gotta go, grab your keys and get ready. I don't know what we're facing."

"What?" Dustin said coming back into the room. "What do you mean you don't know what we're facing?" Dustin immediately put his head set back on, fiddling with the channels on his waist. "Come in!" he screamed into the microphone.

"What are you doing?" Hopper said taking the head set off his head. "Are you stupid, there are people listening?" Dustin glared at him, taking the head set from Hoppers hand.

"We need back up," Dustin said.

"I don't count kids as back up," Hopper said back. "I count them as being in the way."

"What is it," they heard softly from Dustin head phone. Lucas's voice sounded tired. "Hello?" Dustin and Hopper glared at one another.

"We need back up," Dustin yelled into his microphone. He moved away from Hopper as Hopper let out a breath of fire. "Meet us at the place they keep her, if you know what I mean." Hopper let out an angry grunt as he picked up his large gun from the floor. He watched as Dustin walked down the hall way away from them, talking softly into his microphone. He hated kids.

...

Mike stood in his basement, his backpack half open as he listened to his parents argue up in the living room. He placed a canister of water in his bag, some extra cloths, some medical supplies he found in his parents bath room, a flash light and last but not least his radio.

"What do you mean you don't trust the government," he heard his father yell as the door to the basement opened. He looked up the stairs to see his sister coming down with her own bag.

"We have at least an hour before mom starts thinking about us again." She said as she placed her backpack next to his. "I took the keys," she said showing Mike the car keys.

"But you don't know how to drive," Mike said.

"That's not true," Nancy said defensively. "I don't have a license, but that's because mom won't let me get one." Mike rolled his eyes at her, zipping the bag up and putting it on her back. "Is this a good idea, I mean Hopper said they would be at the Byers. Shouldn't we go there first?" Mike shook his head.

"Mom said she dropped El off at the cabin. That's where we're going."

"Okay," Nancy said picking her bag up and placing it over one shoulder. "Let's go before mom figures out where we went." They slipped out of the basement door, locking it behind them before quietly starting the car and leaving their house. Watching as it sank

into the distance, their quiet neighborhood sleeping in the night.

...

El stood in the bath room, listening to Will yell from his place on Hoppers bed. She looked at the dark bruises as they started to form around her throat, she tried again to talk but nothing came out. A chill ran down her spin as she looked behind her, no one watching. She slowly turned around to close the door, turning on the warm water from the sink to drown Will's voice out. She watched as the water fell down the drain. She looked at herself in the mirror, the cut above her eye brow, the gash on her chest. She could see the tiredness in her eye as she started to feel tears run from them.

I don't want to see you anymore, what did that mean? She thought about when she closed the gate, how the mind flayer seeped through, almost touching her. She could feel it then; the hate and fear that it gave off. It didn't want her there; it didn't want her to close it off from their world. Maybe that's why he did it; it wanted him to kill her because without her, there would be no closing of the gate.

She heard loud knocks on the door, making her jump as she looked behind her. She could hear someone at the front door fiddling with the locks; Will's screams getting louder as the door opened. She turned the sink off, looking at the closed bathroom door not knowing if she should open it.

"What happened," She heard Hoppers voice say. His steps stomped through the cabin quickly. El could feel herself break down; she could feel a relief but panic build back up inside of her. The cabin door closed, and she took a seat on the bath tub, not quite ready to see him.

"What do you mean E?," She heard his voice boom. She jumped a little, closing her eyes in hopes that it would make her invisible. She could hear his loud footsteps as he busted through the bathroom door. She refused to open her eyes because that would mean she would see him, and he would see her. She wasn't ready to break down.

His hands on her shoulders did it. The comfort on his energy made

her fall apart as she looked up at him. He brought her into a hug, squeezing her tight as she grasped for air through her cries.

"What are you doing here," he whispered to her. "You shouldn't be here." She gulped down air, letting him go to look at him. She opened her mouth to talk, forgetting that she couldn't. She put her hand to her throat wincing at her touch. He rubbed her back as she looked through the open door, Dustin standing with his eyes wide. He slowly walked into the bath room, taking a seat on the tub next to her. She began to cry again, letting her chin fall to her chest, her hands to her face.

"Let me go!" Will screamed. El put her hand to her mouth as she tried not to whimper, no sound coming out. Will let out a loud laugh.

"Will," Joyce's voice said. "Will, look at me."

"I'm going to kill you," Will said lightly. "I'm going to kill you!" He screamed.

"Shit," Dustin said next to her. Hopper stood from his spot in front of her, walking out of the bathroom looking over to Will. El looked out the door way; Watching Kali's crew stand in the kitchen, their eye expressing the same fear that everyone else felt. El let a gulp run down her throat painfully. "I called Lucas," Dustin said to her. "He should be coming by, along with Max." El looked at him; thinking about how many people they could fit into such a small cabin. She could feel a sweat building up under her arms. She could hear her heart in her ears; she could feel her pulse in her fingers. "I don't know where Mike is, I don't know if Lucas was able to get ahold of him." Dustin continues to talk. Will screamed, Dustin said more things, Hopper walked around the cabin loudly, and El's ears rang as her heart beat began to pulse out of her chest.

"Shut up," She yelled to the cabin. Her throat gave a sharp pain as she put her hands to her neck. Dustin jumped; everyone out side of the bathroom stopped. She brought in a few breaths, trying to think, to focus. She thought about how much she wanted to grab a cup of water and drink it. She thought about the triple decker waffle extravaganza she had been craving for days. She felt a dark chill come around her. She looked through the bathroom door, everyone

staring at her, Steve holding his nail bat, Hopper taking two plug in heaters, Kali taking a slow step towards her. It was as if she saw red with Kali, this was all her fault. She was the reason why everything came back, she did this.

El stepped out of the bathroom glaring at Kali throwing her to the back wall of the kitchen with her mind. The girls smacked the wall, staying in place a few inches above the floor. Kali struggled to get free, her arms restrained by an invisible source as El took a few steps towards her.

"El," Hoppers voice warned, but she ignored it. She could feel it. She could feel the dark anger building in her as Will let out another loud laugh.

"You did this," El said through her hurt throat. "You brought all of this here. You only think about yourself." She could feel a dark chill run up her spine; her energy building up as she pressed it hard to Kali. The wood of the wall slightly creaking.

"Jane," she gasped. "Don't do this." Her mind said stop, but she continued; stepping closer to the girl as she felt her eyes darkening, her mind turning black. There was banging behind her, Will screaming, people yelling her name as she got in front of Kali. She grabbed her left arm, lifting the sleeve of her black glove to look at the number stamped onto her skin. She thought back to the eleven that gave her the identity she would always hate.

She wanted to hurt something; she wanted to end it all. She looked to the knife holder by the sink, and then back down at the girls wrist; lifting her own. She wanted it all to stop. *Just grab it*, she could hear in her head. *Do it, do it!* She let kali fall from the wall, pushing Axel and Mick out of the way as she moved to the knives. Grabbing the biggest one she could find, looking at her reflection in the blade.

"El," a familiar voice yelled through the group of people. She felt cold, and lost. What was she doing again? Why did she feel dark? She's mad, but she can't remember why. She was tired, and as she looked at the knife she felt like that could be it, that could help.

She felt someone nudge her from behind, and hand coming into view;

knocking the knife from her hand. It clanged to the floor, and Will let out a little giggle from the bed. She couldn't get out of her gaze, her eyes on her empty hands.

"I see you," Will sang through the crowd of people.

"El," Hopper voice played in her ear. He grabbed her shoulders turning her to have her face him. She looked around her, feeling the chill leave her, warmth coming back to her skin. "Look at me El," El looked up at him; his eyes wide with concern.

"El," Mike's voice played through the group of people. He stood by the open front door with Lucas, Max, and Nancy. El looked back up at Hopper in confusion, trying to open her mouth to say something but nothing could get out. She looked over to Will, who still fought against his restraints. How did he do that to her? Hopper looked over to the boy and then back at her.

"We need to get you out of here," He said dragging her to the front door. He let her go, throwing her to Mike who gripped her arm. She let out a breath as he placed his arm around her dragging her to the front door. "We'll play this like last time," Hopper said behind her. "You take that radio and tell me when it's out of him." Mike dragged her past the threshold of the cabin out onto the porch. The cold air made everything better. He heart wasn't beating as fast, her mind felt a little clearer.

"What happened to you neck," Mike said, slightly holding the base of her neck. She let out a slight gasp at his gestor, his hands moving away from her. "What did we talk about," he said to her with anger in his voice. "You promised, where ever you go I go." She looked away from him, looking out to the trees. A few twigs in the trees breaking just to her right. Mike followed her gaze to the noise. Both of them looked through the tree searching. But couldn't see anything; it was too dark. She could hear Lucas, Max, and Dustin coming up behind her. All five of them looking into the forest as they heard footsteps coming in all directions; men with guns appearing through the dense trees.

"Shit!" Dustin yelled, as the bad men surrounded them.

12. Chapter 12

El could feel someone pull at her hood as Mike stepped in front of her. He let his arms stretch out to the side of him as if that would stop anyone from getting to her. She could hear Will in the background, not sure what he was saying as all the kids on the porch surrounded her, bringing her back inside. She slowly stepped back, all the men surrounding the house holding up big guns at them. They came from all directions, and as she heard one scream not to move, she thought of the safety plan Hopper had made for them a year ago.

I distract and you escape.

Hopper stood in front of the door, pulling at Mike's backpack to drag him inside. She watched as everyone in the house backed into their corners, not sure on what action to take. Kali still stood in the kitchen, Axel and Mick glaring at El as they blocked her from view.

"I said don't move," a man yelled from the outside. Mike stumbled towards her, Dustin and Lucas surrounding her as Max went for the Knife that El had dropped on the floor. Hopper slammed the door shut, as if that would keep the bad men out. He locked the door with all its locks, turning to El with raised eyebrows.

"I distract," he said to her before a gun shot was heard. A small hole appeared in the front wall of the cabin, small wood particles flying into the air. "Get down," Hopper yells before more gun shots were heard. Everyone hit the floor, Mike landing on top of El while Lucas screamed next to them.

"Shit," Dustin yelled with his arms over the back of his head, El couldn't breathe as dust fell to the floor, the shots continued to fire through the walls. She could feel a sting on the cut in her chest, her throat closing in with pain as she tried to calm herself. She felt Mike cover her head with his hands as she lay on her stomach on the floor.

And then there was silence.

"Stop!" she heard a man scream from the outside. "We need them alive!" she looked over to Hopper, as he sat up with his gun in his

hands. Holes litter the wall and the front door, Joyce cried on the other side of the couch, as Steve stood from where he was with Nancy and Jonathan, grabbing his bat and moving to get the kids furthest from the door.

Mike help El up to her feet, one of his hands covered in blood. She looked down at herself to see where it came from. Max sat huddled in the kitchen with Kali's crew. Axel pulled a hand gun from his pocket jacket; cocking the trigger back ready to fire. Mick and Dottie drag Kali to the bedroom, but Kali fought from their arms to stay up front.

"I can distract them," she said to the group, everyone looking at her with a little bit confusion. "Just let me go out there and I can distract them." Will laughed in the corner, his body covered in small wood chips. A knock came to the door, making everyone jump, their heads flying in the direction of the sound.

"Eleven?" Came a male voice. "Papa's here, there no need to be scared." El looked at Hopper, their eyes meeting for a brief moment. Hopper raised his gun higher, anger dancing on his face. "Don't make me force my way in there." Brenner said with a bight of anger. Kali brushed past El shoulder, walking to stand next to Hopper as they both glared at the door. Will gave a slight whimper. El looked in his direction; Joyce standing over his, the space heaters not yet plugged in but placed around his bed.

"You should go," Will said weakly to his mom. EL could see tears falling from his eyes, a fight of emotion playing on his face. "You should run," El felt a chill run down her body as she got closer to him. Her small steps made no noise; the distant sound of banging on the door didn't disturb her as she watch Will struggle with an internal fight. "It's going to come," he cried, his face stretching as he tried to fight back a smirk. Joyce brushed the hair form his face, glancing over to El with panic in her eye as the door slammed open. She heard Hopper yell with his gun raised as Kali screamed and fell to the floor. There was a gunshot as one of the bad men fell to the floor, another two crowding into the room as they began to fight for Hoppers gun. Axel stood from the kitchen firing his gun three times into the crowd as two men fell to the floor.

She felt someone grab at her arm, pulling her away from Will as she

watched men tackle Hopper to the floor; Axel firing more shots before running out of bullets. Brenner slowly took big strides into the cabin as El was pulled to her bedroom door. They locked eyes with one another before he took a gun that sat in his right hand and pointed it at Hoppers head. El stopped in her place from whoever was pulling her back. Her breathe catching as he cocked back his gun staring at her all the while. Men crowded the room, the small space getting even tighter than it was before. Two men picked Kali up from the floor, a dart in her chest as she lay asleep.

"Now," Brenner said looking at her. "You will come with me Eleven, do you understand?" Her stomach dropped at his words. She felt a hand grip hard on her arm, she slowly looked back to see Mike behind her. Nancy stood close to him, her eyes trained on the men with guns. "What is it going to be," Brenner yelled looking around the room. "All these people dead, or you walking out of that door with me?" El looked at all her friends, Lucas holding Max behind him, Dustin standing with Steve close to the kitchen table. She looked to her closed bedroom door; Tory sleeping on the other side. She could feel a tingle in her brain as she began to think, as she began to concentrate.

She looked at all the men with guns; her eyes slightly glazing over with red, as she felt anger build inside of her. She could feel her energy fly from her body, gliding in the air as she wish them to stop breathing. Brenner looking around him as his men started to choke on the air, he watched as one fell to the floor, and then another. He raised his gun at her, her mind still concentrated on the bad men around the room. She wanted to leave Brenner for last, but before she could really kill any of them she heard a quiet shot and a tingle in her chest. She looked down; a dart hanging out of her skin as black liquid fell into her blood stream. She looked back up at Brenner, as the tingle in her brain began to disappear, and each man gasped another breath.

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Mike felt a pain in his bicep, but he ignored the feeling as he caught El before she fell to the floor. He pulled the dart from her chest before it could be fully drained into her. Hopper yelled, busting the back of his head on one of the guys that held him down. All the men

with guns began to back everyone against the wall; Mike could hear them scream at his friends as they pointed guns to their heads. He held El in his arms; his breathes becoming irregular as he tried to concentrate on El. He could Hear Nancy behind him of say his name in fear before he saw Brenner in his view bending down in front of him.

"Looks like you were hit kid," Brenner said hovering his hand over Mikes arm. Mike looked down at the damage, finally realizing why his arm hurt so bad, why he felt so weak. Blood oozed from his jacket sleeve, his upper arm was grazed by a bullet. Brenner went to grab El from his hands, and even if the motion pained Mike into a scream he held her with as much strength as he could.

"Don't touch her," Mike growled through his teeth. Brenner gave him a small smirk before placing his arm over Mikes wound and giving it a small squeeze. Mike saw white as the pain ran through his body. He could hear Nancy scream as men surrounded her. Dustin yelled at the top of his lungs, but all Mike could focus on was not vomiting from the pain as Brenner let go of his arm and snatched El away from him. Mike bent over in pain, letting his forehead touch the wooden floor as he held his right elbow for support.

"I'm going to kill you," Hopper yelled, the sound of scuffing made Mike think that Hopper was fighting back. He tried to open his eyes but could only concern himself with breathing. He heard Will laugh from the corner as someone cut him from his restraints.

"Put him to sleep," He heard Brenner say from far away as Will began to scream.

"Don't touch him," Joyce yelled. Mike slowly raised his head from the floor to look over to his friend on the bed. One of the men produced a needle, filling it was something clear and stabbing it into Will. The boy screamed as Jonathan tried to fight one of the men off from his brother. Jonathan was pushed to the ground, one of the guys punching him a few times in the face. Mike watched with tears in his eyes as his family struggled, Hopper by the door yelling as a man began to beat him. Steve pushed two men off of him as he went for his bat, but was pulled back and pushed into the kitchen table. Men carried Will out of the door as Joyce cried over Jonathan. Nancy

hovered over Mike as he began to go pale from blood loss. Max yelled from her spot behind Lucas men continued to beat Steve and Hopper up, before being satisfied with their work and walking out the front door. Mike could hear their car start up from a distance as the entire cabin remained in silence. He could feel tears warm his face as Dustin rushed to Steve's side, the cries of Joyce on the other side of the couch leaving a chill in his body.

Mike sat on top of the kitchen table as the bigger man from the group of punks cleaned his bullet wound. He squeezed his eyes shut in pain as Nancy stood on the other side of him holding his shoulder with tears in her eyes. Dustin helped Steve with the cuts on his face, Hopper stood next to them in the kitchen with a raw piece of meat on his eye. Mrs. Byers sat on the couch with Jonathan, even with his face beat up he took care of his crying mother. Refusing to get help until his mother was okay.

"You got lucky," the big man said to Mike. Mike stared into the distance, not feeling lucky at all. "It just grazed your arm. It's going to hurt using it for a while, you might have a nasty scare, but over all you got lucky." Mike listened to Nancy let out a big breath of air. Mike looked straight ahead to Hopper, who stared at him through one good eye as he kept his beef bandage over his other.

"Don't you think we should get out of here?" he heard Max say softly to Lucas. They stood against the small wall by El bedroom door. "Will said-"

"Will probably said a lot of things," Hopper interrupted. "We need to gather ourselves up. We need to eat, sleep, and then figure things out." Mike felt anger build up inside of him.

"We should already be out there," Mike said with bitterness in his voice. "They could be anywhere by now." Mike instinctively moved his right arm in protest, wincing as his muscle clamped down in protest.

"Yeah," Hopper said to him, putting the meat he was holding down on the counter. "And what are you going to do when you find them? Fight them off with one arm? Use a slingshot to blind them with pebbles?"

"At least I would be doing something?" Mike yelled back.

"Oh yeah," Hopper breathed stepping closer to him. "You think I don't want to go out there and shoot every one of those assholes in the head, because I do. But we can't just rush out there without a plan." Silence filled the cabin again. Mike listened to the man attending his arm, feeling the pressure build as he tied a piece of a torn shirt around the gash.

"My names Ray," the man said to him, extending his hand out to Mike's good hand. "I didn't know Jane well," he continued. "But from what I have seen she has good values, and Kali really trusted her, even when they had differences." Mike took the man's hand weakly, not really knowing how to react to the exchange. He looked to the bedroom door, where the rest of his crew sat with Tory.

"Why didn't they take her?" Mike asked looking back at Ray. "I mean, she's one of them isn't she." Ray looked over to the closed door and then back to Mike. He shrugged his shoulders in silence before picking up the bloody towels and bringing them to the sink. Mike looked up at his sister, her eyes locking on Jonathan.

"I do think we should pack up and head somewhere else," Hopper said walking over to the front facing wall. He pulled at small wood strips from the bullet holes, slowly rubbing his head. Mike could see the dark circle under his good eye, the stress in his shoulders as Hopper looked around the cabin. "Looks like I need a new house," he said under his breathe.

Mike jumped from his spot on the table, regretting the decision as his arm shot up in pain. He cradled his arm to his chest and Lucas stuck his arm out to him to bring him into a little hug. Dustin came behind him, sharing in the small hug exchange, Max rolling her eye before she step in with them.

"Now you're the coolest one in the party," Max said as they broke apart. "You literally got shot and lived to tell the tale. That's badass." Mike let a shy smile play on his face. He looked over to El's room, his heart falling slightly. He felt like he failed her. It reminded him of the time at the school a little over a year ago. When Brenner held her in his arms, she cried Mike's name, too weak to move. He couldn't think

of a plan, all he could think was just finding her, of just taking her back before anything else could happen to her.

"We're going to pack up," he heard Hopper say softly behind him. He saw the man bent down eye level with Mrs. Byers, his hands on her knees. She had stopped crying a little while ago, her face glazed over as she stared at the bed that Will had occupied. The wires that tied him down hanging loosely from the corners of the metal frame, the heaters spread around not even plugged in. Mike looked to the floor beside of. Some of his blood stained the wood from where he had stood with El, the dart that flew into her chest lying almost under the sofa. He bent down, picking it up. Through the glass he could see black liquid, not all of it had gotten into her before he had taken it out of her.

"What do you think it is," Lucas said from behind him.

"It looks like some X-Men shit, like something out of a comic book," Dustin said, taking a few steps and grabbing the dart out of Mikes hand.

"He shot her with it at the quarry," Mike said. "She was opening the gate, rocks were floating and she was screaming. It made her fall asleep, it made her powers stop working." They all stared at the black liquid. Mike tried to think of what kind of medicines made people sleep, what components go into a liquid that could make someone so weak.

"Well," Dustin said looking up at his friends. "The liquid must affect her brain waves, since her telekinetic powers have to do with the energy that from in her brain."

"We just need to think about what part of her brain she uses when she uses her power" Lucas said. "Maybe that can help us figure out what kind of chemicals they used to put stoppers on whichever part of her brain they are trying to shut down." He grabbed the dart from Dustin's hands holding it up to the light to get a better look at it. Mike turned to Mrs. Byers. They had worked on the brain before. He pictured Will's first place science fair trophy in the Byers living room.

"Did Will keep our old science fair project," Mike asked walking over

to her.

"What," she asked confused.

"The brain we made for out last science fair. The one we won first place on?" Hopper looked up at him in confusion.

"Yeah," Mrs. Byers said. "I made him keep it. I have a memory box for both of the boys, in my closet." Mike looked over to his friends; both Lucas and Dustin nodded their heads.

"You guys are nerds," Max said under her breathe.

Hopper stood from his spot in front of Mrs. Byers. He walked around the cabin grabbing his gun, and the old wooden one from the floor.

"Let's move out I guess," he said to everyone, moving to El's bedroom. "No one's getting left behind," He said walking into the room. Dustin opened Mikes backpack, throwing the dart inside and handing the bag over to Mike.

"If we find out what in that thing," Dustin said, "Maybe we can figure out how to help El out when we find her." Mike nodded his head, he swung the bag with his good arm over his shoulder; ready to get moving.

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There were no lights, just a slight ray of sun that came through the front window of the van. El moved her hand to place over her eyes. The sun beam was perfect on her face and the bright light was hurting her eyes, but her hand was stopped by cold metal placed around her wrist. She bunched her eye brows in confusion as she squeezed her eyes shut, her head was hurting, and her body felt like jell-o. The last thing she could remember was Brenner's face.

Her eye shot open again. *I'm in a van*, she thought looking around herself to figure out what was happening. She moved her hands again; the metal of handcuffs scrapping against the medical bed bars rang into her ears. She couldn't see anyone around her, just two heads in the front seat. She could see a few tree pass in the front window, they were moving really fast.

I distract you escape.

What happened to the escape part? She thought she would rather help than run. She didn't want to leave her family behind. She thought about the gun fire, the wooden dust covering their bodies, Mike's bloodied hand. Her breathing began to pick up, her heart was racing, and to make things worse her neck was in so much pain it was causing the air to get stuck in her throat.

"She's awake," she heard the driver say from the front. She moved her eyes forward, watching as the man that sat in the passenger seat turned around. Brenner smiled at her, his gray hair falling slightly flat, his eyes tired. He unbuckled his seat belt, moving to get closer to her. El could feel a cry build up in her throat, the pain of her injury not allowing her to make much noise.

"It amazes me," Brenner began to say as he hunched his back, walking to sit next to her head. "You look so much older with long hair." He touch a stray curl, El jerked her head away with anger. "You had such long blonde hair when you were younger. I didn't think you hair would come out so dark if it ever grew back out." He rested his back against the van wall. She moved her head away from his direction, looking at her left hand shackled to the bed.

"You have to understand," he said to her slowly. "They would have gotten you killed." There was a pause; El felt her chin wobble as she let a tear fall from her eye. "You would have gotten them killed. They have no idea what kind of threats lie out there in the world. They don't know how much this country needs you." El shook her head, opening her mouth with a silent cry. "Your work isn't done here, and even though you have caused some sort of," Brenner moved his hands in the air, looking for the right word. "Let's just say you have made the scientific community question life as we know it."

El thought back to Will. *You should run.* It was coming, it was going to destroy them and she wouldn't be there to help. She opened the gate again, she let the monsters out. She was a monster, not a hero.

"Our new lab is a little warmer," Brenner continued. "You'll have your own room, and your own bed; just like before." El yanked her right arm from the side of the bed, the hand cuffs stopping her from more

movement. She kicked her legs, letting a scream build in her lungs. She was a monster, nothing more or nothing less. She didn't want to be here, she didn't want to go back. She needed to move, she needed to stand, and she needed to run.

"I think you'll be surprised," Brenner said a little louder trying to talk over El's banging as she moved. "To know that we aren't going to kill any of those friends of yours. Unless they give us probable cause." El let out a pained cry. "You know what that means right?" She couldn't breathe because the walls were caving in, and she couldn't think because the only thing she could see was her imprisonment. "That Jim Hopper, what a guy." Brenner patted her shoulder, moving back up to the front and putting his seat belt back on. El stopped her movement. She was giving up, just for now.

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He was going to call the only person he could think of, and that was Sam Owens. He didn't want to talk to the man over the phone. He knew they were listening, they were always listening. He looked out the front windows of the Byers house. He could hear the boys in Joyce's room as they went through her closet. Someone was in the shower, and he could hear Joyce as she moved pots around in the kitchen like she was doing something.

The sun was slowly rising, and Hopper pulled a cigarette from his pocket, not caring that he was inside. He lit the end while holding it in his mouth. Inhaling the strong nicotine; the ash warming him slightly as he breathed out. He hadn't had a smoke in a while, he told her that he would stop and he had, but he couldn't help himself in this one moment. He saw the gun that Brenner held, he thought it was a real gun, and as he shot El he thought it was a real bullet, but it wasn't.

Hopper turned around to see Max sitting against the wall in the corner. She played with her hands looking off into the distance. Hopper let out a deep breath, looking at the small girl debating on if he should say something.

"I'm okay," she said before he could open his mouth. "I was just thinking about how nice it would be in California right now." Hooper

took a drag of his cigarette, nodding his head with a little chuckle.

"I'm sure it's nice and warm there right now," he said letting the smoke fall out of his mouth. "I took my wife to California once, well Ex-wife. She liked the east coast better; less hippies I guess." Max let a smile play on her face. She slowly stood from her spot walking towards the kitchen.

"I think I like it here more," she said walking past him. He raised his eyebrows, watching as she turned down the hall to the boy's voices. He turned and looked back out the window, looking down at his cigarette; half of it left. Joyce's hand came into view, taking it out of his hand before taking a big long drag from it.

"We need to ask her some questions." Hopper looked over to Joyce, not quite sure what she meant. "That Tory girl. I'm sure if we ask, she would be able to find them. I mean El said before, that she saw here in that place." Joyce moved her hand in the air creating a space with the lit cigarette sitting in-between two of her fingers.

"She hasn't woken up in a while," Hopper said. "But she was able to stop Will for a minute; maybe she can do more than we know." He stole the cigarette back from Joyce, taking in a gulp of smoke as she slightly smiled at him.

"Remember when we would hide cigarettes in biology." Hopper gave a slight laugh, coughing slightly as smoke came out of his mouth. "Ms. Fisher always said we smelled like cigarettes but it was only because we were smoking them in the back of class."

"How we got away with that I'll never know. Although, Ms. Fisher was blind as a bat." Joyce gave a slight giggle, looking out to the rising sun. Her face quickly turned upside down in a frown.

"These poor kids," She said. "They'll never be care free." Hopper listened to Mike, his voice building from down the hall. He thought about how he would bully people like them in high school; how he would laugh at any kid who would raise their hands with the answer. He regrets it now; not taking the time to learn. "You ready?" Joyce pulled him from his thoughts. "Let's wake the girl up, let's find out where our kids are." Joyce lifted up her window, throwing the

cigarette out, turning around to move down the hall.

Hopper took one last look out the window, watching as the sun slowly rose in the sky. He pictured El, smiling as she looked at her birth certificate. The feeling he had when he handed her the blue bracelet. He turned away from the window; he was going to find her.

If anyone follows me on Archive I am so sorry it has been so long since I have updated. I just got a new teaching position and my life has been insane for the past two weeks, plus my car broke down in the middle of all the craziness so I haven't had time to update. I promise it will come out soon.

For the rest of you all thank you for reading! I have been having a great time working with these characters in my writing and I hope to keep going. I have started a small Instagram blog if anyone is interested. I am posting every day for a year, mostly to see how far I come and what happens in within this next year. You can find it under the name samvblog. If I get enough followers I would love to have small video of not only stranger things topics, but also anything to do with writing. Come check it out!

13. Chapter 13

She didn't know when she had fallen back asleep, and when she felt the slow movements of someone holding her she let her eyes drift open. For a moment she thought she had fallen asleep on the couch again and Hopper was moving her back to her bed. She'd woken up every time he picked her up, but didn't want him to know that she was awake and pretended to be sleeping. The feeling of being tucked in at night always gave her warmth she would never be able to describe, but as she felt a sheet touch her skin she felt cold. The air was almost stale, and each sound made an echo.

She let her eyes drift into the pale room. She could hear the sound of squeaking wheels leave the room, and as she turned her head to her right she met the gaze of Papa; Brenner. He was looking down at a stuffed animal of an old lion, the toy making a shiver run down her spine. She closed her eyes when she saw his finger twitch a bit, not wanting him to know that she had woken. She could feel the toy fall next to her pillow, the sound of his shoes on the tile floors grew silent of he closed the door and let her to lay alone.

She opened her eyes to look at the ceiling, the small squares making her feel nauseas as she thought of her old room from what felt like ages ago. She looked down at her bed, her hands were finally free, the blanket white, thin, and scratchy. Her room might have been smaller than her last one, the walls a dirt white, and the overhead light reminded her of the snow in the sun, almost blinding. She slowly sat up, pulling her knees to her chest, Mike's cousins clothes still on her body, but her shoes were missing. She could feel her chin begin to wobble, but refused to let the warm water fall from her eyes. She let it turn to anger, looking to the door and waiting.

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Will was having a bad dream. He was back in the upside down, but instead of hiding in Castle Byers like he always did he was in a city; one he couldn't place from the design of the sky scrapers. He walked the empty streets, watching as black vines moved around the old dirty buildings. He felt like he had been walking for hours, turning aimlessly down random streets, looking through the sludge covered windows to find nothing; until

he made it to a dead-end; a big library sitting tall amongst the small buildings around it. He took a look behind him; he had made it to the outer rim of the city.

The air was colder than what he had remembered; although this felt different all together. He tried to think of the last thing he remembered, but all he could picture was the light of the sky fading as he drifted to the bottom of a body of water. Was he dead? He thought about his uncle. His mother would always tell him the story of him drowning at the lake one summer, and how the life guard was able to restart his heart. Will placed his hand over his heart, feeling a small rhythm play as he stood in the middle of an unknown street. He let out a breath he didn't know he was holding, moving up the steps of the library, knowing he would have to find some place to hide; what was safer than a place full of knowledge.

He was finally able to get the door open after slamming his body against it a few times, but before he could get a good view of what the library had to offer, he felt his eyes fly open.

"Mom?" he said automatically to the empty room. His voice slightly echoed into the tall ceiling, the sound of metal against metal made his ears hurt. He moved his hands only to find that they were restrained to the side of his hospital bed. "Mom!" He yelled, his heart speeding; water forming in his eyes. He looked around the room; it almost looked like Hawkins Lab. In front of him lay a big mirror. "Mom?" he cried quietly not knowing what was happening.

He felt like his head was heavy, and his arms were sore. There were cuts on his wrist, but they didn't look fresh, almost as if he had been restrained for a while. He thought back to his dream; the city, and the library. He thought about the buildings he past, about all the tall sky scrapers he couldn't really place. He had seen them before, but he didn't really know where he had seen it. He closed his eyes trying to concentrate, trying to think, but he couldn't. He couldn't focus his mind, because all he could feel was something inside him; like a scream wanting to leave throat. The warmth of the blanket wrapped around him was making him feel sick; the sound of silence driving him insane.

He let his arm fly sideways fast with force, and anger built inside of him as his got caught on the hand cuff that was keeping him in place.

He just wanted to move freely, he wanted to eat something, and he wanted to get the damn blanket off of him. He closed his eyes to the frustration. The only time he could remember the anger that he felt in this moment was when the mind flayer was inside of him. The time he looked at the guards in the lab, the guns strapped to the side of their waste. He had never felt the need to kill a man, but in that moment he wanted to; he needed to.

Will opened his eyes, letting the anger calm him. He could hear gasping, the feeling of something crushing under his hands. He pictured El in his mind; sitting over her and choking the life out of her. He calmly closed his eye, letting the world around him go dark as he heard himself scream.

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"Maybe we should think of this like depression," Dustin said as Mike slumped against Will's bed. Dustin sat on top of the bed holding the old brain model. Lucas sat against the other side of the bed with Max, the sound of Dustin moving the brain back and forth in his hands was starting to drive Mike insane. "I mean they say when a person is depressed it has to do with receptors in the brain right? They aren't getting the right chemicals from one place to another?" Mike moved onto his knees, grabbing the brain from Dustin's hands; stopping Dustin in his movement. Mike glared at him.

"I don't know man," Lucas said on the other side of the bed. "Can we take like a ten minute break or something? I can't keep my eyes open, and I think your boring drone of a voice put Max to sleep." Dustin rolled his eyes looking to Mike.

"What do you think," Dustin asked Mike. Mike had been silent for a while, his body coming down from the adrenalin high, and his arm was really starting to hurt. He looked at the brain for a moment. He thought of the time his mom locked herself in her room when her and his dad had a small argument. She later told him and Nancy it was over a lack of communication, and that everything was fine. He knows she just got scared when she heard him grab his car keys later on in the night, and rushed out of her room.

"Maybe what they gave her stops the communication from one part of

her brain to another." He thought about how his arm didn't really hurt at first, how all he could think about was staying alive, and keeping El safe. Now that the chaos had calmed down his arm was hurting. "Maybe she would just need something that made her brain think she was scared. That way she would go into fight or flight." Him and Dustin locked eyes with one another. "Like when we were at the cabin. She couldn't do anything until the men busted into the cabin. She reached her fight or flight response, and started using her power again."

"So you're saying all we have to do is scare the shit out of her?" Dustin asked, taking the brain back from Mike. They stared at the brain together, both in their own thoughts. Mike let his eyes drift to Will's window; the sun had been up for a while now, but he really wasn't tired.

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"This won't take long," the woman said as she took velcro plastic cloth around El's arm. It blew up with air; the noise of the nurse pumping the small black ball in her hand was giving El a migraine. She watched as the cloth inflated suffocating her right arm. "Hmm," the woman said stripping it off of her and grabbing her clip board from the small trolley she rolled into the room.

"We're waiting," a man said from the open door. He held a small black gun at his waist, his hat almost hiding his eyes.

"Yeah yeah," the woman said, putting all her supplies back in order. "Get up girl," she said to El, pushing the cart against the wall. El looked around her room, not sure if she should listen to her. She let her bare feet hit the cold floor, the woman grabbed her arm with force, shoving her to the guard and then going back to work on her cart. El felt a little growl building in her throat, and die out as the pain almost blinded her.

The man pretty much dragged her down the hall. It looked different from the place she had once thought was home. She was able to see a few windows down the hall. Doors lined the wall, each holding a small barred window towards the top. She hadn't tried using her powers yet, too scared that it would hurt her head more than it did

already. She imagined how it would be when she did; how everyone that walked in her path would be dead, because she was a monster; that's what monsters did.

They walked for a while in what felt like circles to El. At one point they went down a flight of stairs, and then another time through two large wooden doors. She watched he slide a card through a little machine by a large metal door, gripping her right arm at the same time. The door clicked loudly, and he pushed it open dragging her inside.

The large room was cold, a large tank filled with water on one end, a metal chair with a bunch of metal contraptions on the other. She stared in fear thinking back to a show she watched with Hopper one time; where the spy got locked into the metal chair, only to be fighting for his life while a laser came towards his body.

"Ah," she heard a voice boom and echo. She jumped out of her gaze, looking away from the chair to see Brenner walking up to her. "Let get you started with something small." She looked over to the tank as her stomach dropped, and then back to the chair as her heart beat started to pick up. "Oh no. None of that for today. We have other plans." The guard pushed her as Brenner let the way to the small office that sat in the corner of the large room. They filed in, the space warm with large computers and lights flashing. There was a small chair sitting in the middle of the room, the guard pushed her towards it.

"Now," Brenner said, pushing her into the seat. El looked around wide eyed as more guards started to file into the room. "There is no need to be scared, but you know how this goes Eleven." She looked up at the man, trying to place anger in front of her fear but she couldn't figure out how. "We can't have this hair getting in the way," he said placing his hand through her curly hair. She pulled away and winced as one of his fingers got caught in the curls. She stood from her seat, looking at all the men in the room. All their guns rose as she glared at them with intense eyes.

"Now now," Brenner said to the men, raising his hand to them to place the guns down. He went to put a hand on her shoulder, but she pushed it away.

"No," she said in a raspy voice. It pained her to talk, but she would rather that pain than lose her hair.

"Don't be spoiled," Brenner warned, shoving her into the chair hard. Men came fast behind them as she kicked out. Two grabbed her arms as she tried to punch them away. Brenner pulled zip ties from his pocket to hold her down. She cried at how tight he tied her to the armrests. The plastic was cutting into her skin. She kicked her legs out as she let out a scream, the lights in the room slightly brightening.

"Do it already," someone said beside her. She could hear a vibration as cold metal touched her scalp, and she stopped moving as she watched her hair fall into her lap.

"You know how this goes," Brenner bent down in front of her, placing a hand on her knee as she let her head fall in defeat. "Now you should start coming to the realization," he continued, "that you are going to be here, and you are going to help us. You are old enough now, you have seen enough of the world to know that it needs saving. You are what's going to save it." Brenner stood from his spot, making his way to the door. "She needs more time before we start. Make sure you bring her back to her room when she's done." And then he left.

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"She needs to wake up," Hopper growled in anger as the punks glared back at him. "Don't you want to find your friend to?"

"Yeah," said the Mohawk, "but from what little we know about what her and Kali can do sometimes they need rest."

"She'll never be able to find them if she's too weak," Ray said. Hopper huffed looking at the girl that lay in Jonathan's bed. He looked back at the group, the girls half asleep in the corner, while the guys took guard. He had sent Joyce to bed, telling Jonathan not to leave her side. He could hear Nancy on the phone down the hall; the boys had quietened down in Will's room. He backed himself into the door frame, looking at the small girl in the bed.

"What does she do anyway," Hopper asked them. He tried thinking back to the night El slept walked into the cold. He thought about when she screamed in pain when Dustin pulled the bullet out of the girl.

"It's complicated," the Mohawk kid said. "She messes with your emotions, yeah?" he slowly sat himself down into the corner. "Make you feel things you don't want to feel. Make you feel pain you never thought was possible." Hopper looked over to Ray, who sat down on the side of the girl's bed.

"She's just a girl," Ray said. "Trust me when I say, she's more scared of herself than we are of her." Hopper scratched his head, letting his eyes fall slightly as he turned to look down the hall.

"When she wakes up," Hopper said, "Tell me." Ray nodded his head once, and Hopper walked back down the hall way. He passed Nancy as she yelled over the phone; flopping himself on the couch before letting his eyes shot only for a second.

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"I don't think your understanding the situation here," Mike woke to Hopper angry voice. It was muffled by the closed door, and Dustin's snores from the top of Will's bed. Mike sat up straight, he had fallen asleep sitting up; there was a kink in his neck and he could feel a pulse in his arm. "Just do whatever you do," Hopper said, "and find them." Mike stood from his spot; looking back to see Dustin spooning the brain, while Max and Lucas sprawled out on the floor. All three were fast asleep.

Mike slowly opened the bedroom door, looking a few feet down the hall to see Hopper standing over a bed in Jonathan's room. Mike backed out of Will's room, slowly closing the door as he went. He took slow soft steps, looking through the opened door way to see the girl sitting up in bed. Hopper stood over her, pitching his nose in frustration.

"I should wait until she's asleep," She said. Mike took a closer step into the room. He looked at the punks all around him; Ray gave him a slight nod from the other side of the bed. "If you say she had been

injected, than the best time to find her is when she most venerable." The girl put her hand to her head, she ruffled the small patch of hair that began to grow all around her scalp. Ray took a red beanie from his pocket, placing it on top of her head.

"How do you know she's not asleep now?" Mike asked. Hopper turned around giving him a sad glare. Mike looked down at himself. His cloths were still dirty from when they went to the quarry; he let his right arm hold his left. He could feel the bags under his eyes, but he didn't care. "Maybe she's still asleep; she was knocked out only a few hours ago." He looked over to the girl, stepping closer to her to stand next to Hopper. She looked him up and down, and then right in his eyes.

"You are the one she watches," She says to him. "I've seen you before in the dark place that we meet." Mike felt a slight blush play on his cheeks, Hopper let out a small cough.

"Are you going to at least try?" Mike asked her. She gave an annoyed sigh, hugging her blanket around her body.

"Everyone needs to be quiet," she said as she started to close her eyes.

"Wait," Mike said thinking back to what he and Dustin had talked about. He looked up at Hopper. "I have a theory," he said to Hopper. Hopper rolled his eyes at him, but he continued. "I think in order for her to truly get a hold of her powers she needs to trigger her fight or flight instinct." Hopper raised his eyes brows in confusion. Mike let out a sigh. "Maybe if she gets scared enough she will be able to hack into the part of her brain that they tried to shut down when they shot her up with that black stuff." He looked back at the girl, sitting down on the bed next to her. "If you see her tell her I was hurt, but don't tell her I'm okay."

"Wait, wait," Hopper said. "Make sure she knows they took Will, and make sure she knows Kali is with her too."

"She needs to feel like she needs to flee. The gates open, the monsters are coming, I was shot." Mike said to her.

"What's the gate?" She asked him.

"Long story," Hopper said. "Just hurry up and try." The girl blinked at them both, before slowly closing her eyes. They all sat in silence. Mike watched her eyeballs dance under her eyelids. For just a moment he let himself feel hope.

...

She was back in her night gown, and it was cold. She shivered with the scratchy covers on top of her, but her eyes kept closing and even with all the will in the world, she couldn't stop them. She longed for some peace, just a moment of sleep where she didn't have to be reminded of anything. As she felt her self lift into the nothingness she kept hearing the sound of someone breathing right next to her.

She opened her eyes to see, only to find that she stood alone in the darkness. The water around her feet was freezing, and the air was chilled making her breath fog.

"I'm here," she heard the voice echo around her. She spun in a circle, unable to find anyone near her. "I'm here," she heard again. She stop spinning, listening to her environment; trying to search in the distance. "Jane? EL?" El turned around, Tory standing right behind her. She looked at the girl, a blanket around her shoulders, and a hat on her head. She looked better, like she wasn't sick any more.

"How did you find me?" El asked. "How is everyone? Is Hopper there? Are my friends okay?" Tory raised her hand to stop her from speaking. El could feel a cold breeze play on the top of her naked head.

"They took your hair," Tory said to her, a frown deepened on Tory's face. El could feel a slight tinge in her heart. She put a hand to her head.

Pretty?

Still Pretty.

She was happy Mike wasn't there; he wouldn't see her like this. She was happy Hopper was gone too, because she wouldn't know how to look him in the eyes. She brought this on herself, because of who she was. This was going to be her life; it was meant to be her life. Maybe she wasn't supposed to be normal, maybe that's why she was here again; maybe that's why bad

things always seemed to happen when she was around.

"They took Will with you," Tory began to talk again. "Look for kali," Tory's color started to fade.

"No," EL said out loud. "Please don't go."

"The gate," Tory kept talking but El couldn't hear her. She mouthed words, but silence filled the air as her body began to fade away. El could feel tears on her face, as she watched the girl go; she could feel warmth on her upper lip. She took in a gulp of air, closing her eyes, and snapping them back open to a dark room. It was cold, and she cried as she hid her head under her blanket.

...

Mike watched as the girl fell back onto the bed. Her eye remained closed, and even though she said it would take a little while; it felt like they had been sitting there for ages.

"Jane," the girl said quietly. Mike perked up at the name, looking up at Hopper. They both leaned closer to the girl, listening carefully. The girl didn't say anything after that. She moved to one side, and then slowly to another. She let out a shallow breath before snapping her eyes back open. Blood ran down the side of her face, and she sat up while whipping it away.

"What did you see?" Mike asked. "Did you find her? Do you know where they are?" The girl took the hat off of her head, moving her hand over her head. He could see water building to the rims of her eyes, and wondered if what she saw was worse than they thought. He could see how much it took out of her, the darkness setting under her face.

"She was so sad," she said slowly. "It felt like she didn't want to try anymore; like she had accepted where she was."

"No," Mike said loudly. He thought about the last few days he had spent with her. She had been distant; okay with being on her own. *She was always quite*, he said in his head. She was okay with leaving him behind. She didn't think twice when leaving with Will to the

lake. Maybe she wanted to give up; maybe she was tired of being herself. She opened the gate, but that wasn't on purpose; she did it out of fear.

"They took her hair," The girl put the hat back on her head. A tear slipping from her eye, she removed it from her face fast. "They took me from my mother when I was young," she said looking into Mike's eyes and then around the room. "More like I took my mother away from me, because I could never control taking over people's thoughts and feelings." She looked around the room of people, and then down at her hands. "My mother and I had the same hair, and they took that from me. It was the only thing I had that was hers." Mike slowly looked up at Hopper, not sure of what to say.

"She felt close," she said. "I don't know, this time it just felt different." There was a silence that moved through the room. Hopper let out a grumble of air, turning around swiftly. He walked out the door, putting each hand on the side of his head, before quickly punching the wall in the hall way. The sound was loud in the silence, causing Mike to jump. He looked over to the girl, before following Hopper out, and walking out the front door of the house for some fresh air.

He swung on the porch swing he forgot the Byers had. He let the cold wind hit his hurt arm, and he listened to the animals move around the trees as midday past. He thought of the time he found El in the woods. It was raining, and cold, and she didn't have any hair. Even in the dark he could see the fear deep in her eyes, but there was something else there. Something that told him she was determined; her own person.

She didn't give up; she wasn't that kind of person. Even though it sounded stupid; even though he hadn't spent a crazy amount of time with her, he still knew her. She never was the person to give up, and she was always willing to put others first when it came to danger. He couldn't believe that she was willing to stop believing in herself, because without her then how was the world going to be saved this time?

Hopper stood in the doorway of the house. The smoke of his cigarette drifted past the porch, and Mike watched it dance in the air before it disappeared.

"I'm going to kill that man," Hopper said throwing the cigarette onto the floor and stomping it out. "We were so close. She was about to have it all; freedom, education, a life." He looked over to Mike, Mike let his eyes drift to the front yard. He watched as the tall grass dance with the trees. He listened to the ruffles of leaves, half frozen from the cold. "Don't you guys have school or somethin'" Hopper said.

"Winter break," Mike said back. He leaned his back against the hard wood of the bench; letting out a small whimper as his shoulder hit the wood wrong, sending pain through his arm. "It's almost Christmas." Mike said. He had big plans for Christmas, other than listening to his bickering parents. He was excited to have El back, it was going to be her first Christmas and he wanted to do so much for her.

"I'm meeting with Owens in an hour," Hopper walked onto the porch, shoving his hands in the pockets of his jeans; his short sleeve shirt providing no heat. "I'm hopping he's heard something through the grape vine. Maybe he knows a place close to here they might be working from." He walked over to the bench, sitting next to Mike. Mike could smell the nicotine on him, but didn't really mind all that much. The smell reminded him of something safe, something warm. "We'll get her back, she may feel like giving up at this moment, but she'll realize how much she needs us." Hopper let a fake grin play on his face. "That girl can't live without you any way." Mike played his game, grinning up at him as if he was happy with the statement. Hopper swatted his Mike leg playfully before standing up. He left Mike to sit, waiting for an idea to play in his mind.

He didn't know how long he had been sitting there, all he knew was that he was getting cold, and Hopper hadn't left yet to see Dr. Owens. There was a small rumble in the trees; the sound was quiet as the leaves shook in the wind. Mike could hear it getting louder every few seconds, but by the time he knew it was something serious it was too late. The ground was shaking; the Earth was giving a quake Mike had never felt before. He could hear everyone inside yell, the sound of a stampede, or was it thunder, a stampede?

Mike watched as one of the trees in the front yard fell, piece of the house were coming off the wall, and dust from the porch ruff was falling down onto Mike's black hair. It only went for what must have

been a minute or so. Mike crouched on the porch floor not really trusting his legs to keep him up. He could hear Dustin yell Earth Quake, and as the rumbling past, Mike still felt like his body was wiggling.

He stood from his spot on the porch, running through the front door to see a slight haze of dust in the air. Hopper took his hat, slapping it against his hand to get the dust off. Everyone stood in the hall way, crouch down like a tornado drill.

"What was that," the Mohawk punk said. Everyone looked around at one another, Jonathan helped his mother to her feet, and Nancy crouched beside him. Hopper looked down at his watch, letting out a cough before looking over to Steve. Steve was helping the kids to their feet, his big hair turning white as the dust settled on his head.

"We should get out of the house," Hopper said. "It might not be safe standing here." Hopper grabbed Mike's shoulder; Mike gave a small scream in pain as Hopper mumbled a sorry under his breath. They all filed out of the house, Joyce gasped at the down tree. In the distance Mike could hear a car alarm, maybe a fire truck or ambulance.

"What's that," he heard Max say. He turned to her voice; she was facing the house; a dark cloud rising in the distance. They all stood and watched as the cloud rose over the trees. Mike could feel his stomach slightly drop.

"Is that-" Mike began to say.

"Everyone back inside," Hopper said fishing through his pocket. "Don't leave the house and find Will's radio." Mike watched as he walked towards Steve's car still looking through his pockets.

"I have them," Steve said pulling his keys out. "I'm coming with you."

"Steve," Nancy grabbed his arm, Jonathan holding her back.

"I'm going," Steve said loudly to her. He threw his keys to Hopper, walking to the passenger side of the car. Mike watched as they got inside, the car instantly turning on; Hopper quickly turned the car around while Steve was still closing his door. He drove through the

grass, past the down tree and out of sight.

"What's going on," one of the girls in Kali's crew said. Mike looked back at the black cloud, getting higher into the sky. He could hear it, a slight whistle in the air. The Mind Flayer.

...

"We're going to do things a little different." Brenner said. El walked over the bridge platform, her small swimsuit tugging at her skin. Her cuts were visible to the air, the gash across her chest finally fully scabbing over. She wondered how her neck looked, if she had a bruise over her eye from the car accident. "We aren't looking for people anymore, we're looking for what you found, what you opened." She looked up to Brenner; ever since she woke up from her small nap she could feel it, the buszzng in her head. She knew it was back, her ability, but she didn't how much of it she had.

She didn't know where she was, where Will was or kali were. One of the lab men fit the wires over her bold head as she watch Brenner walk down the steps. She walked over to the opening of the tank, letting them slip the large breathing helmet over her as she took a step into the water.

They took Will, look for Kali.

They wouldn't know what she was looking for. They couldn't see what she could see. Maybe if she just figured out where Will was, if she could see that Kali was okay; then maybe they had a chance of getting out of there. She let a shiver run down her body as the salt water stung her cuts. She looked at Brenner on the other side of the glass. She stepped off her small platform. Her heart began to race as she listened to them close the latch over her; she was locked in. She stared at Brenner, one of his hands resting on his chin; thinking. She tried to calm her breathes, she tried to concentrate on what was happening.

She was the monster after all, but at least she would have a chance to save them. She could get Will back to his family; she could get Kali away from these people. She tried to remember the word for it, the word Hopper had given her forever ago when he had brought her

back to the cabin. He said he wanted to redeem himself, from the man that he used to be. He wanted to do that by taking her out of the cold; giving her a place to live. Now that she looked back on the memory, maybe he wanted more than being redeemed, just like she did. Maybe he wanted a family too.

The tank became dark, the light leaving the water as they closed her view to the window. Leaving her alone in the water as they listened for any sign that she had found what they wanted. She took a deep breath, before closing her eyes. All she could hear was the ringing of silence, it was her least favorite noise because of how loud it could get. She tried to find the place in between, where she could find them; her friends. She wanted to check on Mike, she wanted to see if Will was still Will or if the monster had taken him for good.

"You have to find her," Mikes voice ranging with an echo throughout the darkness. El let her wet feet take the lead as she looked around her, trying to find the boy. "You have to try harder," El felt her heart skip; he sounded mad. She watched as colors danced in the distance, a group of people standing together. She ran for them, wanting to see what they were doing. Mike stood with his hand on Tory's arm. He looked at her with mad eyes; she looked at him in shock. Axel pushed him away from her, making Mike land on his butt, yelling in pain holding his left arm.

"Hey," Joyce said over the group. "We are not fighting!" El watched as Dustin and Lucas helped Mike up, he bent to the left in pain, something was wrong with him.

"I'm not going to look," Tory said. "She was too weak the last time, and that was only a few hours ago. Plus she's giving up; I could feel it from her. She doesn't want to come back." EL looked at her in confusion. She would love to be home, lying in her bed, her teddy bear tucked under her arm. She wanted to be home, but she knew what came with that. She knew that her life with them wasn't the best it could be, only because of what kind of person she was. People would be after her, which meant people would be after them. She could close the portal again, but she could also make something worse happen if she really wanted to.

"That's not true," Mike said in a raspy voice. He turned to the girl with an ugly glare, his friends mimicking. "She's a part of this party; she is a part of our family."

"I don't want to be here anymore," El turned to the new voice. It was someone standing behind her. El turned, and there Will stood, his eyes dark, and skin pale. "I just want all this to stop, but all I can see is the upside down." He was staring at her, or more like staring through her. She took a small step closer to him, trying to take every detail in. "They keep my room freezing cold, my blanket warm, and they really like it when he talks." Will turned his head to the side, looking at something far away. El followed his gaze, to a larger body of water, large rocks piled around it. "He's coming," Will said in a whisper. "Their coming and you should go." She looked back at him, a tear escape his eye, as he began to disappear.

She didn't know what to think. What was coming, when was it going to be here? She thought about the quarry, maybe the gate was growing; like before. She looked around the darkness one more time, trying to see if she could find Kali through the nothingness. She tried to take in a deep breath, concentrating. All she could hear was a whistle, almost like a train in the distance. She thought about the day she watched the news, how they talked about a tornado touching down in southern Indiana. They said it sounded like a train running over their house; the sound of metal scrapping on metal, the sound of the wind whistling.

She could hear someone open the latch above her tank; she opened her eyes with a gasp. She felt someone pull her up by her shoulders, taking the breathing helmet off her shoulders as they did. She took in a gulp of water as it splashed on her face. Someone pulled her out of the tank, making her land with a thud onto the metal landing. She could hear people moving fast, the sound of sirens playing as they went. El opened her eyes to see people running around the large room, Brenner standing beside her with wet arms.

He grabbed her roughly, making her stand; dragging her across the platform bridge and down the metal steps. She looked around frantically, her body letting out shivers as her wet body tried to get used to the temperature. She slipped slightly on the tiled floors, as Brenner took her out of the doors and into the lab hall ways.

"We still don't have all of our equipment," a man said keeping pace with them. "They still haven't given us the go ahead to get more weapons, and the guns we do have are scares. We can do a total shut down of the building, but they got through our doors last time, metal and wooden." Brenner pushed him away as he opened the doors to

the stairway. He dragged her up the stairs, into the next hall way; he was taking her to her room. She looked around her as she watched people stretch files, and run down the halls, radios in hand. Some yelled orders while others ran through doors with guns.

"You're staying here," Brenner said, opening the door to the room she had been staying. He pushed her through, slamming the door behind him. "What did you see?" he yelled at her. She shook her head, not sure what to say to him. "Don't lie to me, we know it's spreading, it's coming here. Is it coming for the boy?" She looked around the cold room, her body still dripping with salt water. She let out an angry growl, looking to her bedroom door, and pushing it open with her mind. She looked at Brenner with death in her eyes, because she had enough; she was done. She let him fly into the wall, his body hitting it with a loud smack, and then he landed on the floor.

A nurse jumped at the sound as she ran down the hall way, looking at her with wide eyes as she went. She could hear Will screaming in the distance, and the sound of squeaking wheels. She ran out the door, blood dripping to the floor as she went. Each door she came to she opened with a bang, finding them empty. She got to the end of her hall way, opening the last door, clothes lined the small closet. She raised her eyebrows walking in.

She found white coats and scrubs. She took green doctors pants from a small pile, throwing them on over her wet suit, tying the string around the hip. She grabbed a shirt behind her, pink like the nurses wear. She peeked her head out of the door, trying to decide what to do. If she went for Will she knew a few things could happen. He could kill her, like he tried to do before, he would scream, like he had been doing, or he could get into her head again.

They're coming and you should go.

She tapped her fingers on her legs, bouncing up and down trying to figure out what to do. She didn't know where Kali was, and she knew Will was close but he wasn't Will, he was that thing. She slowly made her way down the hall, people ignoring her as they ran through the building.

"Hey," El stopped in her tracks, the nurse that had looked her over

just hours before staring at her. "What do you think you're doing," the woman got closer to her. Her face stern moving to grab El's arm. El moved, sliding away from her twisting her head slightly as the woman screamed, her arm bending in a way even El knew it shouldn't

"I'm sorry," EL said quietly to her. "I'm sorry." She moved a little fast away from her, not really sure where she was going.

"Stop her," the woman screamed down the hall, but no one paid attention through the panic. After many hall ways, and going up on flight of stairs El finally found a glass door. She could see the trees outside, a wind making them dance. The sun seemed to be going down, which meant it was about to get cold outside. She looked down the hall one more time, not sure if she should leave or not.

"I'm sorry sister," she said before pushing the glass door open. She walking onto the side walk, following it out to a parking lot where she watched people run to their cars. Some sped down the road while others went through their trunks, looking for anything that would help. El looked to the sky, she could hear it; the whistle she heard in the void. She stopped in her tracks, spinning in a circle as she looked for it; the monster.

"Kid," someone yelled from one of the cars. "Get the kid back inside," El looked around seeing men with guns run towards her.

"Eleven," she could hear Brenner say from behind her. She looked around her, taking in her options. She didn't want to be here when it came, she wanted to be shellfish; she wanted to run. She looked to the men running her as she stood in place, twisting their necks and letting them fall to the ground. She heard some people scream as they ran back into the building, she looked back at Brenner, who looked to the sky and then to her. She turned, looking at all the cars that sat in the parking lot.

She knew Max had driven a car once. Mike had told her about it over the radio one night. She looked a small blue car that sat closest to her, walking up to it and opening the front door. She sat in the driver seat, trying to remember how Hopper did it. He always had keys, and that's what made the car work. She looked at the key hole on the

right of the steering wheel, turning it up and letting the engine turn on. She smiled at herself, closing the door. She moved the seat slightly forward, her feet still not touching the peddles. She frowned and remembered that she could use them with her mind. She pressed one down but nothing happened, than pressed the other down and car roared. She looked around her in confusion, not understanding why she wasn't moving.

"You have it in park," El jumped at the voice, a cold breeze came through the passenger side door. Kali stood in her hospital gown, her hair buzzed just like hers, he nose bleed more than she had ever seen. "Let's switch, I'll drive." EL looked at her in confusion. Trying to piece together how she could be there. "Move!" Kali yelled at her. "We don't have much time, and if you want to get to your friends we'll have to move fast." El nodded her head one, crawling over to the passenger seat as Kali slammed the door shut.

She looked behind her through the back window. Brenner was gone, and most of the people had left the parking lot. Kali took a seat, closing her door and putting the car in reverse. El pulled her seat belt over herself, listening to the click before looking over to the girl

"I realized I had my power back when I started to hear those sirens," she said driving out of the parking spot. She took the turned in the small area too fast; El slammed into her door and gave a small wince. "Brenner should be confused once he realizes he's not taking you back to your room, but a flower I picked and had given him," Kali said looking to El as she blazed past the guard post and out of the lab parking lot. "I would have come looking for you if I had known you were there." El looked down at her hands, feeling band. What did that say about her, she knew Kali was there, but only looked for a small amount of time before running.

"Same," she said to Kali. She was telling a lie, and it felt bad. "I would have looked to." The car remained in silence as Kali flew down the road, the sky getting darker, but not with night; with dark cloud.

14. Chapter 14

Hopper wanted a cigarette. He wanted to sit on a porch, bring in the warm ash, and watch as the day passed with ease. He looked over to Steve in the passenger seat, the kid clutching his nail bat as if it would help him in this situation. They drove to the quarry, to take in the damage, and figure out how badly they really needed his girl to come and save their asses again. He watched as the sky got dark, the clouds illuminating with red and yellow lightning. He let himself panic for a split second, feeling his stomach drop, his heart speeding in pace. He was reaching heart attack age; he couldn't deal with this shit anymore.

"I think we can both agree that maybe driving towards this thing is a bad idea," Steve said through a strained voice. "We should turn around, figure out where they took her; El." Hopper agreed with him, but curiosity was getting the best of him. He needed to know what was coming for them; he needed to know who was in the real danger. He wanted to know what would happen if he got to close. "Chief I'm serious," Steve turned in his seat, grabbing the wheel of the car gently. "Turn around; we can help the town before it gets to them." Hopper slowed the car down, still looking to the clouds. They rose in the air like a nasty storm. The rumble reminded him of the tornado that swept through the town in 65'. As the clouds grew they flew down the high, away from them.

"They're not going to the town," Hopper said, taking a closer look at the movement. "It's moving away from us." Steve took his hand from the steering wheel, looking out the front window of the car. Hopper felt something, something cold move through him; a bad feeling. His thoughts went to El, to the fact that they shot her up with something that took her powers away.

"It's going to them," Steve said. "Maybe it's looking for Will." Hopper looked around himself at the trees, the abandoned high way, and then at Steve. He stomped his foot down on the gas pedal, speeding to the clouds with no fear. Steve flew back in his seat, cursing at the sudden speed as they went down the high way; Steve's car not going as fast as his police truck.

...

"What's happening," Kali yelled as they sped away from the new lab. El looked back out of the car window, watching the dark hospital building get further away. She felt something stick in her chest as she thought of who she was leaving behind. "Hey!" Kali yelled. "I would like to know what I'm driving into before we get there." EL turned back around in her seat as Kali sped around a corner onto the small high way, the storm lying in front of them. The clouds rose past the sky, the color of black and red playing on her face.

"I don't know what it is," EL said. "I don't know anything; I just know I did this." Kali looked over to her slightly, trying to keep her eyes on the road.

"It felt weird," Kali said, looking back to the road after a moment of silence. "Waking up without being able to use it; my power." Kali lifted her hand from the wheel, looking at it as if she would be able to see something. "I was able to use it just then, but I feel it going away; that buzz in my brain." El closed her eyes, trying to concentrate on her brain; that's what gave her this power. She thought about the morning she woke up from closing the gate, how Mike told her what a brain was. She felt slightly stupid, for not having the simple knowledge that he did.

She looked up the high way, the road ahead of them blocked by a black fog. She thought about the quarry. They must be close, because it was there, in front of them, moving.

Kali slowed her driving down, not sure if she wanted to drive into the darkness. El looked over to her sister, then out of her window. She watched as things moved through the trees, something was out there but it was becoming too dark to see what they were. She pictured the demon dogs she had seen just about a month ago. She pictured the monster that stood over her with no face, and how Will stood with it in the void.

"Keep going," EL said.

"What?" Kali said. "I'm not driving into that." El looked around the car, looking to Kali with a dark stare. She glared down to the gas

pedal, trying to find something inside of her to press down to make the car move. She had it back at the lab. She was able to get into the void; she was able to get out. She got slammed into the back of her seat at the gas pedal pressed down, Kali let out a gasp of surprise, grabbing the wheel and turning it one way as the car went the other. They skid down the road, balancing out; driving straight into the storm.

...

"Look again," Mike said loudly. He could feel something inside of him boil as his friends stood in between him and the girl. "They didn't give up on you right?"

"Mike," Mike felt Joyce's hand on his shoulder, the sting making him wince once before pushing through his friends.

"I don't think you understand what's going on out there," Kali's crew drew in front of him; standing around the girl as she sat on the couch in the living room. Mike let out a huff of breath. He wanted to calm down, he didn't want to be the rash one, but for some reason he couldn't stop himself.

"Mike," he heard Dustin say behind him. "Maybe we should go into the kitchen, do what we do best, and formulate a plan."

"Yeah man," Lucas said, "yelling isn't going to get anywhere right now."

"Shut up," Mike yelled turning to his friends. "You don't get it do you?" Mike walked to the window, lifting the shade to show the clouds growing dark. "It's coming; the Mind Flayer. You know as well as I do," He looked to his friends; Joyce having tears run from her eyes. He looked to his sister, who looked outside with him. "The only way this thing stops is if we have El." He turned back to the girl, giving her a glare. "You are going to find her, and you are going to tell her what is happening. She will have no choice but to come; that's who she is."

The girl let out a breath, slamming her back into the couch and putting her hand to her hurt shoulder.

"I don't think you get it," the girl said quietly looking to Mike. "I've been in the situation she's in. I used to live outside of the lab, I had a life. You don't think I wanted to get out of there." Mike glared at her, his breath catching in his chest. "They took it from her, her freedom, and once you don't feel that power inside of you, you give up." Mike could see red; he could feel a fire deep inside of him.

"Maybe you're mixing your feelings up," Mike said in a harsh tone. "Because El doesn't give up, and she doesn't give up on us."

"Hello?" a distant voice came through. It was hushed, but familiar. "Hey shitheads," Mike's backpack rested against the living room wall, his walkie talkie inside. Dustin ran for his bag, grabbing the device out and lifting the antenna.

"We're here, over," Dustin yelled into the speaker.

"This thing is moving away from the town," Steve yelled. "It's moving the other way." Mike looked back out the window from where he stood in confusion. He looked at the clouds, dark but nothing different from that. He moved to the kitchen, his sister following on his heels as he opened the back door and walked onto the back steps.

The air was cold; bring a chill into him, extinguishing the fire. He could see again, the red leaving his vision as he looked to the sky. Mike and Nancy watched as the black towering clouds danced in the sky, moving away from them.

"Where could they be going," Nancy said, "maybe it's the jet stream taking it away." Mike squinted at the clouds as the red lightning spread like spider webs in the cloud. *Where would another dimensional creature go when it come into a new world?* The thought caught him slightly off guard, only because it sounded so ridiculous. *Where would I go?* He thought, looking down at the ground to think.

"Will," He said, looking up at his sister. "Maybe it's looking for its host, maybe it's looking for Will."

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It was like being in fog, and everything around them seemed to stay

the same. El let the gas pedal fall as they entered the dark cloud, letting Kali take full control of the car. El looked at her surroundings as they slowly made their way forward. Kali struggled; looking for the head lights to see through the dark. El could feel her heart picking up with fast beats, trying to figure out what would happen next.

"Okay," Kali said, sitting up a little in her seat. "We drive slow," EL nodded her head. She couldn't see the trees, and she could barely see the other side of the road. She could feel a chill build over her body, her spine giving in to a shiver. She felt like something was watching her, like something was following them.

She clipped her seat belt from its latch; sitting up a little more in her seat. Her small body was barely able to look through the mirrors fully. She watched as the mist moved past them, making the space behind them stay the same. As the car pushed forward it almost looked like they weren't moving. She could feel a stitch in the side of her lung as she let in air fast. She grabbed her side, messaging the muscle.

"Put your seat belt back on," Kali instructed. She looked over to El, El looking at her with her hand still at her side. "I don't know what's out here, and if I hit something I don't need you flying out of the window." They stared at one another for a moment as El felt a cold breeze play in her short hair; something in her side vision moving. Her and Kali quickly looked back at the road as a large black figure flew in front of their car. Kali pressed the breaks on the slow moving car, El flying forward; placing her hand on the dash board as a Demogorgon smashed into their window.

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"We either got too far from the house, or this thing is affecting the signal," Steve said hitting Wills walkie talkie. Hopper slowly made his way through the clouds, frowning at the red light flashing above him. They had been driving at 40 for at least ten minutes, his low beams on as they made their way through the dark mist. Steve hit the radio in his hand one more time before putting it back on the car floor. Hopper looked through the rearview mirror, then out of his side window. He couldn't see the trees on either side of the road, and he

could barely see anything in front of him.

"I wonder how long this goes on," Hopper said mostly to himself. He could feel it, like a magnet on his body as they drew deeper into the darkness. There was something watching them, and he felt like they were being followed. "Do you see anything," Hopper asked Steve as he slowed the car down a little bit more. Steve looked out his window squinting. He let his hand rest on the handle of his bat, the nail head sitting on the floor by his feet.

"I don't see anything," Steve said. "Something doesn't feel right though. Like it would anyway, we are traveling through at dark mist from another dimensional world."

"I would much rather keep that for another time. I don't want to know what we're traveling through right now." Hopper gripped his steering wheel, leaning forward in his seat and squinting his eyes as they made their way forward. He just wanted to get to the end of it, he wanted to open up to a clearing where he could see, and his heart would stop beating so fast.

"Wait," Steve said sternly, putting his arm out in front of Hopper to stop him. "Did you see that?" Hopper looked from Steve to the road in front of him, slowing the car to a stop. They sat in the car, the air getting colder; listening. Hopper looked out his side window, looking for anything moving within the smoky mist. Steve gripped his bat with both hands, not able to extend it over his head because of how low the car ceiling was. "A shadow," Steve said, squinting his eye in front of him. "I saw a tall shadow."

Hopper let out a big breath, grabbing his gun at the side of his hip. He looked at the large gun sitting in the back seat, grabbing the handle slowly so he didn't drop it in his shaking hands. He let his eye look up at the back window, gripping the large gun in one hand and his small gun in the other. His breath stuck in his lungs, his heart blasting in his ears as his eyes landed on a large body on the outside of the car.

"Uh Steve," Hopper said not moving from staring out of the back window. Steve slowly turned his back, looking over to Hopper, than following his gaze to the back window.

"Shit," Steve wheezed. Both Steve and Hopper lurched back, Hopper dropping the big gun to the back seat floor. Hopper let out a small yell, turning his body to the front seat to see what hit them. A Demodog stood on the hood of the car, its flower like face half open; saliva dripping from it layers of teeth. "Shit," Steve said with a little more force. "Drive!"

Hopper took that cue, slamming his foot onto the gas pedal. The demon dog slid on the hood of the car, letting out a cry as Hopper turned the wheel slightly. The car flew to the side, and as he tried to straighten them out the dog flew from the hood, smacking onto the top of the car; leaving a dip in the ceiling. Hopper looked into his review mirror, the dog landing on the road behind them, the large body of the Demogorgon gone.

"We need to get out of here," Steve yelled as Hopper looked at their speedometer. They were reaching sixty miles an hour, the wind pounded on their windows, and the red lighting playing in the darkened sky as Hopper squinted to see through the black mist.

"No shit," Hopper yelled back. He didn't ease up the gas as they flew down the highway. He placed his handgun into the cup holder in the middle of their two seats; staring back at the road, not caring if anything ran out into front of them.

"If this is going for Will," Steve began to say, reaching for the walkie talkie that sat on the car floor. "That means wherever he is it will be crawling with those things." Hopper tried not to think about it. He didn't want to think about El, Or Will, hopelessly trying to stay alive in a place filled with killer creatures. Hopper listened to the static as Steve fiddled with the channels on the walkie talkie. "Is anyone there, over?"

"We're too far," Hopper said to him. "The only way they would be able to hear us is if we had some major radio system." Steve looked down at the device, tapping the antenna on his forehead; thinking.

"We shouldn't have come this way," Steve turned in his seat to look at him. "How are we going to fight off an army of whatever those things are?" Steve looked out his window, searching through the dark fog. "I mean, we are a badass team and all, but my looks, and your bronze

will only get us so far." Hopper rolled his eyes. The black mist let up slightly in front of him, the view of trees coming into his vision from their side of the high way. A dark shadow showed up slowly on the other side of the high way, a figure walking out into their side of the road.

Hopper slammed his breaks, the screeching stinging their ears. Steve let out a small yell, bracing his hands on the dash board as the car came to a hard stop. They both let out rushed breathes, as the body moved forwards fast towards the car. Hopper grabbed his gun; while Steve slightly raised his bat.

"Shit!" Hopper yelled, throwing his door open as Kali walked forward. She was barefoot, her head shaved, shaking slightly in her hospital gown. He had never seen the girl look scared before. Her and her crew where always straight faced when it came to situations, but as Hopper looked the girl over as she ran to him he could see the fear in her eyes.

"She won't wake up," Kali said. Hopper moved forward, Steve falling out of his car and following Hopper's lead. Hopper ran past Kali, the car they had been traveling in stopped a little ways away. The window broken, the front of the car dented. Blood sat in a pool on the road. Hopper staggered to the passenger seat, El slumped in the seat. Her eyes, nose, and ears bleeding, but there something else wrong with her. She had a gash on her bold head.

"This thing just ran out in front of us," Kali said. "We weren't going that fast, but I couldn't stop fast enough. She flew through the car window, but the thing was still alive." Kali pointed to the side of the road. Hopper followed her finger to the grass, and Demogorgon lay motionless. "She killed it, but it's been hard for us to gain enough energy." Hopper looked back to El, than looked throughout the car. He felt his stomach drop when he didn't see Will.

Hopper looked over to Steve then down the road. He didn't know what to do. They had to get them out of there, but they also had to find Will. If he came home to Joyce without him he knew she would go ballistic.

"We can come back," Steve said reading his thoughts. "We need to get

her medical attention, we need to regroup." Hopper looked back down the road, then over to Kali.

"The hospital is a little ways down this road," she said to him. "I think it used to be some kind of psych ward." Hopper let out a breath; he knew exactly where that was. He let a soft curse leave his lips as he gave into the erg to run. He felt around El ribs, making sure nothing was broken around her chest and abdomen before picking her up. All three of the quickly moved to the working car; the lights shinning into Hoppers eyes. Steve opened the back doors, Kali stepped in first, sliding down the seats; opening her arms for El and Hopper laid her across the back seat.

The slamming of the door echoed in the dark silence. Hopper looked into the review mirror at kali, who looked down at El with guilt in her eyes.

"Joyce will understand," Steve said, placing his bat down on the car floor, picking up the walkie talkie in its place. "We'll get him back; we now have people who have been there, she can help us lead the way." Hopper looked over to Steve, nodding his head once and placing his gun back in the cup holder. He slowly turned his car around, speeding up slowly as he kept his squinting eyes on the road.

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"When we get Will back we do what we did last time," Dustin said standing at the head of the table. Mike could feel his eyes slightly water as Joyce lit another cigarette next to him. He could still feel something inside of him wanting to fight. He tried to bite his lip, not wanting to yell at anyone that got in his way.

"I feel like it's going to be a little harder than that," Lucas said to him. "If this thing, this Mind Flayer is out than what if we can't get him back." Max nudged his arm with an angry expression on her face. "Sorry Ms. Byers," Lucas said lowly. Ms. Byers let out a sigh of smoke, Jonathan grabbing her hand from across the table. Mike looked up at Nancy; she wrapped her arm around her boyfriend, resting her head on his shoulders.

"You don't know that for sure," Dustin said to him. "Let's think back to

The Exorcist," Dustin said.

"How about we don't," Mike said with more attitude than her meant to. He felt Nancy's eyes train on him as he looked over to his friends. "Maybe we should all just shut up for a minute."

"What's wrong with you," Lucas spat at him. "Every time something happens to El you become this stupid brat." Mike and Lucas glared at one another; Mike let his fists rub together under the table. He grinded his teeth slightly, trying not to let any nasty words go past his lips.

"Let's go outside," Nancy said from across the table.

"I don't want to go outside," Mike said back through his teeth. Nancy looked past Mike into the living room. The punks sat around one another, the girl sitting on the couch with Ray, her head on his shoulder.

"Well maybe you should," Nancy said back, standing from her seat. Mike grumbled under his breath; letting his chair grind on the tile floor as he pushed away from the table. He followed his sister to the back door, slamming it behind him. The cold air ran through the fabric of his jacket, his messy black hair swaying in the wind. He let out a puff of air, his anger quickly disappearing.

"I think she's getting to you," Nancy said, stepping down the steps. She walked in the grass of the back yard, looking through the trees, then up at Mike. "I think she's making you mad." Mike looked to the back door, expecting to see the girl standing there.

"It's just," Mike began, following his sister down the steps. "I don't even know what to feel right now." Mike kicked a rock from the last step, watching as it flew into the grass. "She can't give up," Mike said in a quiet voice.

"That girl doesn't know what's she's talking about," Nancy said pointing to the house. "

"El has always thought she was a monster." Mike said looking at Nancy. "She opened the gate again. That," Mike said pointing to the

dark clouds in the sky. "That is here because that gate is open, Will is," Mike looked to his hands to find the right words. "Will's possessed because the gate is open, and I just know El thinks it's because she did it, but it was an accident." Nancy grabbed his hands and he looked up at his sister.

"We'll get her back," she said to him. "We will all get to tell her that it's not her fault." Mike brought in a breath of cold air as the back door burst open. Max flew down half the steps still holding onto the screen door.

"The radio," she said slightly out of breath. "Steve's back on the radio." Nancy ran past Mike and Max. They followed behind her back into the house. The air was stuffy and warm, making Mike feel slightly claustrophobic.

"They're back," Mike could hear Steve yell through the radio. Everyone gathered around the table with Dustin holding Mike's walkie talkie. "Don't-everywhere-dogs-and even the big ones," his voice came in and out.

"They must be still far away," Lucas said.

"If you-we have-she's not looking good-Owens-just make sure he shows up." Everyone looked at one another trying to understand what he was saying.

"Dr. Owens," Joyce said moving to her phone on the wall.

"She could be anyone," Dustin said.

"Maybe it's Kali," the Mohawk punk said from the kitchen door way.

"Maybe it's a total stranger," Mike spat back. They glared at one another, Mike being the first one to look away. *Cool it*, he said to himself. Joyce hung up the phone, picking it back up and dialing another number. Mike looked over to his friends. Lucas and Dustin looked down at the radio; the static was the only thing to be heard.

"We should get ready for them to come back," Jonathan said. "Whoever their bringing is probably hurt." Nancy nodded her head. One moved to the living room, while the other went into the

bathroom getting supplies.

"They can't be too far because we can hear them." Lucas said looking up at Dustin. Dustin slammed the antenna down, moving out of the kitchen.

"I'm waiting on the front porch," He said with Lucas on his tail.

"Maybe we should go with them," Max said to him. He looked over to her, the red head still standing next to him. She looked over to the girl moving into the living room; being kicked off of the couch by Jonathan." Getting some air will do us some good," Max said looking back at him. Mike nodded his head, looking down at the floor, trying not to breathe the same air that girl was. He could feel it, the invasion of emotions.

Mike followed Max to the front door, walking onto the porch with the rest of his friends. He looked over to the tree that had fallen.

"Maybe we should try to move that," He said pointing at the tree.

"With what muscle," Max said with a slight smile. Lucas gave a small giggle as they all walked down the steps, moving towards the tree. Roots sprouted at the ends of it, all four of them grabbing a hold of one. They all pulled the tree, the trunk not moving an inch.

"Wow," Dustin said, slightly out of breath. "We suck."

"Speak for yourself," Max said. "I think this tree's too big for anyone to move." Mike sighed looking up at the sky, the dark clouds dancing, and the red lights moving from cloud to cloud. He felt a chill run through him as he gazed, unable to move his eyes away from the cloud. It felt like it could see them, like something stood within the clouds; looming.

"I hear a car," Lucas said, moving away from the trees. Everyone moved quickly to the porch, watching for the car to make its way down the long dirt drive way. Steve's car came into view. Hopper moved around the tree, and Mike strained his neck to see who was in the car with him. He could see Steve in the front seat, and Kali in the back, her head shaved; slightly shivering. She was looking down at

something, muttering. Dustin was the first to move from the steps cursing under his breath as he got closer to the car. Mike followed him, watching as Steve got out of the car and motioning for both of them to move back.

Hopper opened Kali's door, helping her get out of her seat, while trying to move something else. He watched as Hopper lifted someone into his arm, his jaw dropping when he realized who it was. Her hair was like it had been, the night they had found her; blood moving down the side of her face.

"What happened?" Mike asked, moving around Steve.

"Just let me get her inside kid," Hopper said, rushing past him. Mike stayed on his heels, looking at her head and then over to Kali. She stayed on Mike's heels, following Hopper over to couch, a vision of guilt lying over her eyes. Everyone stood in silence as Nancy and Jonathan moved over to Hopper as he proper her head with a few pillows. They pulled out cotton balls and rubbing alcohol. Joyce moved into the living room with a gasp.

"Everyone in the kitchen," She said motioning to the door way. "Give them some room." Everyone moved except for Mike, Dustin putting his hand on Mike's good arm, dragging him behind the group. Nancy walked behind him, making Dustin stop.

"Maybe you should help," she said to Dustin. "You've helped before, and I think you're the one here with the most knowledge on this kind of thing."

"What?" Dustin whispered. "Just because I read medical books at the library out of boredom doesn't mean anything."

"Just help him," Nancy whispered through her teeth. Dustin let go of Mike's arm, walking past him with a grumble. He looked up at his sister, who slowly pushed him forward without look in front of them; making Mike stumble into someone.

"Watch it," Kali sneered at him without looking up. Mike glared at her as she moved out of the way, slipping on some pajama pants under her hospital gown that someone had handed her.

"What happened," Ray said standing next to her. Kali tied the string around her pants, standing next to the girl who sat at the table. Mike looked at them with curiosity, not really feeling an over power of anger like he had since the day had started.

"We drove through a dark mist," she said in a whisper. "This thing jumped in front of the car-"

"Their back," Steve interrupted loudly. He leaned his butt against the kitchen counter, looking at everyone. Mike looked over to Lucas, who sighed and put it head in his hands. "Hops and I saw it before we found you. The freakin' dog jumped on my car." He motioned his hand to the front door with anger.

"She needs to wake up," Lucas said lifting his head and looking to Mike.

"And do what," Mike said back. "I don't know if you noticed but she has a big gash in her head." There was a pause in the room and Mike voice echoed in everyone's ears. "And when she does wake up I'm pretty sure she won't have the energy to even do anything."

"She had better control than I do," Kali said looking to him. "I still can't feel it; my power doesn't seem to want to come back." Her and Mike shared a glance. "She was able to get out and into the car with her power, so was I, but by the time we were long gone from the place I could feel it being drained again. She still used hers, but it was hard on her I could tell." Mike looked back to Lucas, recalling what they talked about in Will's room.

"She was scared," Mike said. "Or at least, she knew she had to fight. That's why it came back."

"Maybe with a little bit of rest she can do it, we can get her to the quarry and she can close it again." Lucas said back to him.

"Even if we do get her there, and she can close it we still have to think about Will," Mike walked closer to his friend, trying to think of a plan. "We know where he is now; they know what the mist is like. We can be prepared." Mike looked around the room. "Somehow Will found out where he was, that's the only reason why the Mind Flayer

can find its way to its host." Mike took a seat at the kitchen table, his eyes glazing over in thought. "Get me a paper and a pen; we need to make a list on pros and cons. We need to strategize." Lucas moved to the living room grabbing paper from Will's art supplies. They had a long night ahead of them.

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Hopper and Joyce work in a quiet pace. He watched as she gently applied more rubbing alcohol to the cotton swab. Dustin opened one of her eye lids, taking a look at the pupils, and looking over to Hopper.

"I can't be sure," He said sitting back on the arm rest. "I think she might have a concussion, so we need to wake her up." Hopper let out a sigh, standing from his knees and rubbing them. He was getting too old, and he was sure there would be bruises there the next day if he checked.

"Easier said than done," Hopper said, moving Joyce out of the way. He put his hands on the small girls' shoulders. "El," he said loudly, "El, you need to wake up." Dustin stood from his spot, looking down at her with concern in his eyes.

"I'll go get her some water," he said with a white face, leaving the room with haste.

"Honey," Joyce said rubbing El's leg. She and Hopper took turns, trying to coax the girl out of sleep. Hopper could feel the dropping of his stomach each moment she didn't wake up. What if she was in a comma? What if she hit her head harder than they thought?

Dustin came back into the room with a cup of water, watching them gently shake El. Hopper felt the need to be more aggressive, to shake her harder so she would wake up. He was feeling a fear he hadn't felt in a while. His mind went back to the time Sara wouldn't wake up, being placed in a mini coma to help pass with a little less pain.

Dustin stood over her head with the cup of water, looking down at the girl with a thought in his mind. Hopper put his hand on El's check while Joyce said her name with a motherly tone. Hopper jumped in

surprise when he felt cold water splash onto his hand and arm, Dustin poring the glass down her face. He was half way through pouring the entire thing on her, Hopper jumping back from the cold water when El shot up fast, coughing and gasping from the cold water.

"Water to the face," Dustin said with a shrug as Hopper glared up at him. "What?" Hopper placed his hand on El's back rubbing it as El looked around with panicked eyes.

"What happened," Mike said from the door way, walking into the room. El raised her hand to her head, gently touching the now slightly swollen cut on her head. She looked up at Hopper who looked at her with wide eyes.

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El couldn't remember much; she saw mostly black, and not the kind of black that lingered in the void. It was like she was sleeping, but there were no dreams and familiar voices echoed through her ears. It wasn't until she felt the urge to take in a breath that she realized she was awake. She could see the bright likes of Joyce's living room, and feel Hoppers told body sitting next to her. The warmth of his hands rubbing circles on her back gave her a comfort that almost make her cry out

"What happened," She could hear Mike's voice among the others. The cold water dripped down her chin and onto her hospital cloths. She could feel her head pounding, the air cold on her scalp. She looked to Hopper, his eyes growing large with concern. She could see Joyce just behind him as she bent over the couch to get a good look at her.

The last thing she could remember was the pain of being awake. She couldn't think of why she was on Joyce's couch, or really how she got there; all she could think of was the tank Brenner put her in and the panic a sirens as she was taken back to her room. She opened her mouth to say something, but didn't know what to say. She could taste something metal at the back of her mouth and could feel the dryness of her tongue teasing her.

"You hit your head," Hopper said, moving her hand down from her

head. She didn't even realize she had been touching the small bump on the left side of her scalp. She watched as Dustin came around the couch, crouching down to look up at her.

"What do you remember," He said, handing her a half full glass of water. El took it slowly from his hands, looking into the glass and then down at her wet clothes.

"Papa," she said looking back up to Hopper. "Brenner," She tried to think of other things. She tried to think of what happened after her room.

"Kali and you got into a car," Hopper said gently. El looked around the room, Mike slowly walked out of the door way. They locked eyes for a moment before El saw her; Kali driving a blue car.

"It was coming for them," She said looking back at Hopper. "Everyone was running, and hiding; I made her drive into the clouds." Hopper nodded his head, standing from his spot on the couch. He looked over to Mike before rubbing his face in his hands.

"We are trying to think of a plan," Mike said to him. "Kali knows a way into the building, she only knows a few hallways but at least it's not nothing." Hopper looked to Mike, then to El with a frown.

"We have to wait," His said looking to Joyce. "I know you want to go now, but nothing can be done if we are all too tired to fight, and be smart about our decisions." El looked back down at her cup, her eyes were feeling heavy, and there was a ringing in her ears. She had never felt this kind of pain in her head before, and if she turned her head to fast she saw black dots in her vision.

"It's getting dark," Joyce said through a raspy voice. "I think I might lay down, or sit down, or something." Her voice came out dry, making El feel a twist in her gut. She could have found him; there had been time. She could have gone a looked for him, but all she could think of was his hands around her neck. She knew that finding him would have been easy, it was getting him home that would have been the hard part.

Joyce walked out of the living room, Hoppers gaze following her. El

moved slowly, draping her legs over the side of the couch and putting her feet on the floor. She looked up at Dustin, who stood next to her watching Hopper. She nudged the half full glass of water on his arm; he turned to look at her.

"You should drink that," he said to her softly.

"You should lie back down," Mike said getting a little closer. El didn't look up at him, suddenly feeling slightly shy by her appearance. She put her hand to the right side, rubbing her hand on the small hairs. She could feel a slight buzz in her brain if she thought about it, and felt like her nose was about to pour with blood, but never did.

"Bathroom," She said trying to stand. She felt her stomach go sideways, the taste of acid in the back of her mouth. She stumbled slightly, Dustin and Mike reaching for her. Her vision turned black, the light fading from the outer reaches of her vision before consuming her eye site. Things were being said, someone picked her up, but she was lost in the feeling of sickness. Her stomach was churning in a way she wasn't used to, but the cold of the bathroom tile made her feel good.

The darkness let up, and she could see the white toilet in the Byers bathroom sit in front of her. She lurched forward, throwing up acid into the bowl. She could feel herself breathe again; feeling better instantly. She slowly lifted her head, Hoppers hand coming into view and flushing the toilet. She could feel him rubbing her back again as she slowly looked to the door; it was closed. She let out a breath of relief that no one was able to watch her.

"Let's get some other clothes on you," Hopper said. "Maybe a warm hat for this head too." Hopper put his hands under her arm pits, slowly taking her off of the bathroom floor and putting her on her feet. He didn't let her go at first, testing out her balance before leading the way out of the bathroom. He opened the door, with Mike sitting on the other side; his eyes slightly darkened with anxiety.

El felt a blush play on her cheeks as she looked at the boy; she ducked her eyes from his vision. She couldn't explain why she felt so embarrassed. She knew some of it had to do with the expressions, by looks he had given her she knew she wasn't beautiful anymore. She

watched enough "Soaps" to know that woman with long hair had beauty.

"How about you stay her for a minute," Hopper said turning to El, "I'll find some clothes for you." El gave one slow nod to him, letting her back rest onto the hallway wall. Her and Mike watched as Hopper disappeared into Joyce's room, leaving them alone in the hallway, the rest of the group talking over one another in the kitchen. Mike walked in front of El as she diverted her eyes the other way.

"We were supposed to stick together," he said softly grabbing her left hand with his. She didn't know what to say to that, thinking back to just days before when they had talked at his aunt's house. She could feel the water building in her eyes, and she wanted it to stop. Mike moved his other hand slowly to her head. El twitched out of the way slightly, grabbing his wrist with a quick flash. They locked eyes, his in surprise, hers in a mixture of pain and anger. "Still beautiful," he said to her. She felt tears fall from her eyes. She could feel her arm drop slowly as she let go of his wrist. They stood in silence for a moment while she silently cried.

"Wheeler," Hoppers voice whispered. Mikes head snapped to the side. "Get Johnathan will you," EL looked over to the man, half of his body hidden in the door way. He held clothes in one hand holding them up to her. Her and Mike both broke apart, she wiped her eyes walking for the cloths. She looked up to Hopper as he handed them to her; he put his hand to her cheek to wipe a tear away. "We're going to be okay kid," he said to her, before turning back into the room. She snuck a peek before he closed the bedroom door; Joyce sat on her bed, her back to the door.

She went back into the bathroom; unraveling the clothes in her hands to see what she had gotten. Black pajama pants, a green sweater, and a loose white beanie. She looked down at the hat, moving to the front of the mirror to see herself. She hadn't seen her reflection in so long; she was starting to think she wasn't really there anymore. She still had deep bruises around her neck; the pain the sat there wasn't as bad as her head. When she turned her head to the side to get a look, it made her jaw drop. The cut was long, but not as deep as she thought it would be; maybe the hat was a good idea after all.

El had found herself back in the living room, watching as the room filled with people trying to find their spots. Kali sat with Tory across from her, their back to the front window. El and Tory made eye contact, and El could feel darkness in her eyes that she didn't understand.

"I don't really like her," Mike whispered into her ear. She looked over to him as he sat next to her on the couch. He hugged his arms, his shoes were off, and his eyes starting to show the exhaustion that hid behind them. "I think she was trying to make me mad earlier," El looked over to Tory; Kali and Mick talking in on either side of her as she looked at El. "She said that when she saw you in the void you had given up, but I knew that wasn't true." El let the thought play in her head as she turned back to Mike. Had she given up, or was it just the fact that she didn't know what to do.

El thought about the moment they tied her down to the chair, shaving her head as she cried. She had wanted to fight, she felt a rage to kill, but she couldn't. Was that giving up? Letting them do what they wanted to her? Maybe she could have fought harder, maybe she could have gotten out of there sooner.

"I didn't want you to think," Mike had said slowly, bring her out of her thoughts. She looked around him, at his friends moving about the room to make small beds, and then back at her. "I didn't want you to think that this was all because of you; that you blamed yourself. I felt hopeless because I couldn't let you know that it was okay." El closed her eyes to his words, because unlike him, she hadn't really thought about Mike. She thought about Brenner, she thought about her past, and she thought of the word monster that had been dancing in her mind. It was weird because she always thought about Mike, but now it felt like all she could think about was herself.

"Are you okay," he said to her as she let her eyes glaze over.

"Yes," she lied. "Tired."

"Well," Mike licked his lips a little bit before looking behind him, and then down at his watch. "We have to wake you up every thirty minutes." He pressed a few buttons on his watch, the soft beep sounding a few times as he concentrated on the wrist clock. Satisfied

with what he had done he took the watch from his wrist and wrapped it around hers. "When thirty minutes go by, this watch should beep, hopefully waking you up." El looked down at the clock and then back up at Mike.

"Why?"

"Because you hit your head," he said putting his hand to the right side of her hat. She could feel the pressure of his hand on her head, he let it fall to her cheek, and then down to her hand. "We need to make sure you don't go into a comma, or have a seizure or something. You wake up every thirty minutes to make sure you're okay." El didn't know what a seizure was, but by the way Mike said the word she assumed it was bad. She could feel a little bit of panic build inside of her. "Don't worry," he said sensing her fear, "I'll be next to you the entire time.

"Let's have Nancy at the door for the first two hours," Hopper said coming into the room. Nancy followed him along with Steve. She held her usual gun, Steve his bat. "You take the next shift," Hopper said pointing to Steve. "All I need is a few hours of sleep," they both nodded at him. He stepped out of their way as Nancy grabbed a chair from the dining room and putting it by the front door. Hopper stepped around the blankets, pillows, and sleeping bags getting closer to El and Mike.

"You're with me kid," Hopper said pointing to her. She let her head fall slightly; looking to Mike but he didn't take his eyes off of Hopper.

"Let me stay with you," Mike said to him. El looked over to their friends, they stopped their motions to watch what fight would come from Mike and Hopper. Hopper let out a frustrated sigh.

"Fine," he said dryly, moving out of the way of the couch. Their friends all raised their eyebrow at one another as Mike helped her up from the couch. She gave him a little smile, her knees giving a snap as she stood. She looked over to Kali and Tory as they watched her walk through the living room. She watched as Kali whispered something in the girl's ear, her stomach dropping at the secrecy.

"We have a small plan lined up," Mike said to her as they moved into

the hall way. "We can go over it later; Kali said she would help." El moved her head slowly to look up at him, her eye brows rising in surprise. He had dirt on his face, his freckles hidden behind days' worth of fighting and adventure. She looked to his arm, which was placed across his abdomen as they walked. He seemed to hunch over differently than he had before, and walked with a little less bounce than he usually did.

"What happened?" she said pointing to his arm. They stopped in the middle of the hall way; Mike looking down at his arm.

"It was nothing," he said, cradling his arm lightly. "It's just a little hurt." El squinted her eyes at him, trying to think of what happened. She thought of everything that happened in the past few days, the amount of danger they had been in but she never saw him get hurt. She felt a little tingle in her chest, where Brenner had shot her with the needle. She had seen blood on his hand.

"You had blood," she said. She felt bad because she wasn't there for him. He had been bleeding, he had been hurt, and she couldn't help him.

"It's okay El," he said to her, slowly leading her down the hall again. "You're here now, and even if I was hurt, you couldn't do anything about it." She stopped him in his track, not liking the idea.

"No," she said in a stern voice. "You don't get hurt," she said pointing her finger in his face. "You stay safe," She moved down to Will's room where Hopper had disappeared; opening the door to see him making two beds on the floor. He looked up at her with a small smile on his face, she frowned down at him. She shouldn't have come back, because if anyone was to come looking for her, her friends would be in the way again.

"You get the bed," Hopper said to her. She felt Mike come up behind her in the door way. She looked back at him and down at his hurt arm.

"It's okay El," Mike said softly. "I slept on the floor last night so I'll be fine." She turned her head back around, looking at the small bed. She walked up to the mattress, touching the small blanket, realizing it

wasn't like the one she had been using at the new lab. She wouldn't be cold tonight, and she wouldn't be itchy. *Just one night*, she thought to herself. She took at seat, the fabric from her hat getting stuck on the patch that sat ontop of her gashed head. She moved the loose hat around her head, as she watched Mike and Hopper debate on who got what bed.

"I can wake her up for the first few hours," Mike said. "I'll take the closer bed, so I don't have to step over you." Hopper rolled his eyes, sitting down on the floor by the furthest pillow, taking his hat from his head and laying back on the floor. Mike gave a small triumphant grin, looking back to El with a nod; waiting for her to lie down.

She wasn't going to get much sleep, but she knew if she could rest a little bit she would be able to get it done. If she just got a little rest, she would be able to get to the quarry and stop it. She would have to find a moment to back out, to make sure no one saw her leave; just in case it wasn't safe for them. She had done it before; she knew she could do it again.

15. Chapter 15

Mike sat at the Byer's kitchen table as he listened to his sister softly talk over the phone. They were hoping that at this time in the morning their mother would be the one to answer, but sadly Ted grumpily said hello.

"Dad," Nancy said in a harsh whisper. "If I was, that would be none of your business." Mike raised his eyebrows at his sister, not wanting to know what Ted was saying on the other line. "Eww," Nancy said a little louder. "No! I would never do that with my brother in the same house." Mike silently gaged pushing himself out of the chair and grabbing the phone away from his sister.

"I don't know about the Byer's sometimes," his dad continued to talk as Mike put the phone to his ear.

"Dad," Mike said.

"That boy wants to go to art school, what kind of guy does that?"

"Dad," Mike said a little louder.

"Don't even get me started on the whole family situation-"

"Ted!" Mike was growing impassionate at this point. This was supposed to be a fast phone call to their mother. She was in the loop now, and all they wanted to do was make sure everything was going okay in town. The dark clouds had gotten taller over the hours, and without being in town they didn't know how people were taking it.

"Michael," his dad said with a surprised tone. "Why haven't you come home yet?" Mike rolled his eyes, looking over to Nancy who took his place at the table. He leaned against the end of the wall, trying to take in a calming breath.

"Just put mom on the phone," Mike said through his teeth. He looked into the living room, hoping he hadn't woken anyone up. He looked to his watch, forgetting he had given it to El hours ago. He had no idea what time it was, but new the sun hadn't risen yet.

"I would love to get your mother but she's sleeping." His dad said in a low tone. "Do you want to know why he's sleeping son?" Mike rolled his eyes, not giving his dad an answer. "She's sleeping because it four in the morning, and like most people at four in the morning she is asleep."

"Could you wake her up," he looked over to Nancy who leaned forward in the chair, putting her head into her hands. She let out a soft sigh as she began to rub her tired eyes. Mike put his hand onto the receiver of the phone. "Go to bed Nance," He said softly as his dad grumbled words into the other end of the phone. "Get some rest before the sun comes up." She looked at Mike, and he watched the internal debate that was happening in her head.

"Come get me if dad says something weird like "I love you", or "are you okay,"" Mike gave her a small smile as she stood from her chair. She left down the hall, peering into Joyce's room, before stepping into Jonathans.

"Mike!" Mike jumped in surprise when he heard his mother's voice. "Oh god, are you okay?" Mike let out a relieved breath as he heard his mother's voice on the phone; he didn't realize how much he was missing her.

"Everything's fine," he said to her. "I just wanted to check in, let you know that we're okay."

"What's happening?" Mike closed his eyes at the question; he looked back into the living room at his friends and Kali's crew.

"I can't tell you a lot over the phone," he said. "I do want to let you know some things though," he looked down at his left arm, the pain only coming and going when he moved it; not sure where to start.

...

El was sitting in her room, not the one at the cabin, but the one her mother had made her before she was born. She was listening to people talking down stairs as she brushed a dolls hair. The crib was gone and replaced with a nice bed with a big bed frame, the baby decorations replaced with posters of Nancy Drew, an ocean landscape. She had never

been to the beach.

She listened to her mother's voice, at least she thought it was her mother's voice. She sounded mad for some reason. She heard a man talk back to her with ice in his voice, and it made her want to shiver. El placed her doll onto the floor, the small brush beside it as she stood to close the door. She listened for just a few seconds, holding onto the door knob as she peaked her head out of the hall way.

"You can't do this," her mother was saying. "You don't know anything about her, she's shy, she scares easily."

"What other choice do you have," the man said. "Your hands are full, and you and I both know that this was only temporary."

"You're not taking her away from me," her mother said with tears in her voice. "You can't take her from me."

"You signed a contract," the man said. "I can do whatever I want. You and her belong to this country, and you and I both know how volatile she could be to this nation's safety."

"Oh please," El looked up and down at the hall way, not sure if she should be listening anymore. She felt uncomfortable for eavesdropping, but at the same time she couldn't help but wonder what they were talking about. "All you want to do is put your name on whatever study will get you seen. You don't care about us; you don't care about this country. You just want to be the name they put in history books." El listened to the silence, slowly taking her head out of the door way to close her door. "You won't touch Jane," El's ears perked at the name. "She is never seeing the inside of those labs; she is never going to be tested on like some animal."

"I'm sorry you believe that," El let her head slowly go back into the hall to hear a little more clearly. There was a loud bang that echoed through the house, making El jump out of her skin. She closed the door quickly, listening to footsteps on the stairs. She grabbed her snow glob from the dresser, holding it like a weapon and slowly backing away from the door. She took a second to process, looking back at the snow globe with confusion. She had seen it somewhere before; the castle on a hill, the fake snow flying around the water as she moved it around in her hand.

The door opened quickly, a tall gray haired man staring at her. In his hand he held a gun. Her heart started to race as she realized Brenner was standing in her doorway.

"I will always be here," he said, stepping closer. In the distance a beeping noise started to chime. "You're just like me," he said, the beeping getting louder. "A killer," and louder. "You're an infection," he got closer the beeping beginning to scream. "And you will infect everyone that comes near." She dropped her snow globe, the glass breaking on the floor. She put her hands to her ears as the beeping screamed from all around. "You will infect everyone," beep!Beep! "And everything," beep! Beep! "And you will kill them."

The watch on her wrist was what was waking her. She looked around the dark room, and heard Hopper snoring on the floor. She smashed multiple buttons on the watch; trying to remember which one Mike had been pressing all night. Mikes make-shift bed was a mess of blankets, but he was nowhere to be seen. She sat up, a draft hitting her bold head. She looked around to find her hat on the floor, and she quickly picked it up to throw it back on.

She let her feet touch the cold wooden floor as she thought back to her dream. *You will infect everyone*; it almost felt so real for a minute. At first she had thought her mother was talking to her father. She looked over to Hopper, before bowing her head at the word.

Father.

She slowly stood from her bed, letting her arms stretch over her head. She didn't have much of a plan, but knew that today would be the day; she was going to close the gate. She felt a sadness fill her when she thought of Will, but knew he would want it this way. He would want her to stop it no matter what because that was the kind of person he was. She took a few small steps on her tippy toes, opening the door slowly and peeking her head out. She could see Mike at the end of the hall way, his back was to her as he talked in quiet whispers on the phone. She looked across from her at Joyce's door, debating on if she should risk trying to get new cloths and maybe some shoes.

"I can't tell you mom," she heard Mike say with a little more volume.

"When I see you next I'll let you know." He was talking to his mother. She let a frown play on her face, thinking back to Karen and how Mike said he loved her. She wondered if she would ever love her mom like that, if she would ever get the chance to hold her hand and talk to her again.

You will kill them all.

She shook her head, moving from her room to Joyce's. She opened the door slowly, trying to make sure Mike didn't see her in the process. Joyce lay in her bed, Jonathan next to her. They had fallen asleep holding one another; both of their heads resting on the headboard, El closed the door softly, trying to maneuver around the dark room. She opened each dresser drawer, feeling around for the texture of certain clothes. When she was satisfied with what she grabbed she went for the bedroom door; opening it slowly and closing it with silence.

Mike still had his back to her, as he argued with his mother in hushed tones. She walked to the bathroom slowly, closing the door and locking it behind her. She kept the light off. She was thankful that the moon was fighting the clouds to help her see. She looked down at the jeans she had grabbed, along with a sweater that said New York in big letters. She changed quickly, layering the New York sweater with the one she had on. She kept the hat and looked down at her feet. She hadn't grabbed shoes, but at this point she didn't really care. She looked in the mirror one last time, before walking to the window and unlocking it.

She looked back at the bathroom door, feeling the pain in her chest. She lifted the window, the cold wind blowing in her face. She didn't want to leave them, only because she was scared, because she had grown an attachment to everyone that she couldn't describe with words.

Don't be stupid.

She had lived a year by those words, and now she was asking herself if what she was doing made her stupid. She didn't know the answer, but knew that if she didn't do this it would never end. She opened the gate, so she had to close it, but as she stared out the window she

didn't know why she couldn't move. She couldn't bring herself to climb through the window like she had done a few nights before.

There was a loud knock on the door, making El jump out of her thoughts. She turned to the noise as a strong breeze hit her neck.

"El," Mike's voice sounded. She let out a sigh knowing she was missing her chance. "Is everything okay?" She looked down at the watch on her wrist, moving to remove it but stopping herself halfway through. "Hopper's about to bust down the door if you don't open up." El sighed, grabbing hold of the window and closing it. She locked the latches, turning to move to the door. She heard two hard knocks, Hoppers voice arguing with Mike on the other side.

El opened the door slowly, peeking on the other side with a frown. Mike looked up at her from behind Hopper, who stared down at her with a mad expression.

"Don't make me have someone baby sit you when you use the restroom," He said pointing his finger in her face. "Last time you locked the door, you came back with someone shot." He opened the bathroom door a little wider, looking at the pajama pants she had been wearing on the floor. He rolled his eyes, ushering her out of the bathroom into Mike. He grabbed her wrist, looking down at the half attached watch on her arm; a frown forming on his face.

"I'm going to get some sleep," Mike mumbled, licking his lips with distaste before dropping her wrist and turning back to Will's room. El felt her stomach drop slightly because he knew, he knew she was trying to leave again and she had hurt him. El and Hopper watched as he closed the door behind him before Hopper dragged her down the hall way.

"Wheeler made out a small plan," he said in a hushed tone, grabbing the sheet of paper that sat at the kitchen table. "I thought we could look it over together, form so idea of our own before going out and getting things done." El could feel something inside her shift, a moment of weakness falling away as she started to realize what she had done. She had promised herself that she would go, that she would end it before anything could get started.

She took a seat across from Hopper, as he slowly read through the words Mike had written down. At the bottom of the page was a small diagram of hallways. She looked into the dark living room, Tory staring back at her from her place on the couch. She quickly looked away, feeling awkward at the exchange, before sneaking another peek at the girl, but her eyes had drifted back shut.

...

Mike lay on Will's bed looking out of his window, the sun slowly rising outside. He felt something in his chest he couldn't really explain. It wasn't anger, and it wasn't frustration; something he had been feeling for days now. He felt desperate, a need to go back to El and ask why. She was going to leave, he knew she was. The watch he had placed on her wrist was half off, and by the look in her eyes he just knew. He could feel the cold air hit his bare feet from under the bathroom door. He heard the slight creak of the metal as she slowly raised the window.

He watched the sun rise slowly, because it was still way too early in the morning to be out of bed, but it was way too late to fall back to sleep. He didn't know what to think, or what to feel. On one end he was mad, because he had waited three hundred and fifty-three days to see her again. He called her every night, no matter what the situation was. He had craved to see her, or to even hear her, to know that she was okay. Yet, she had been so ready to leave so many times before, and didn't even think to ask if he could come with her. She had made a promise, and that was something they couldn't break.

But, what would he do to help her? She had all the power, all the strength to end it all. She didn't need Mike to baby sit her, she didn't need him to provide a home anymore; Hopper had been doing that for a year now. All the sudden she had found this independence without him, and as much as he wanted to be mad at her, he was tremendously proud.

He was stuck in a circle of thought and emotion. All he knew was that he didn't know his place anymore, for anything. Was he the leader and strategic planner? Was he the angry emotional Mike that wrote on bathroom walls and cussed out neighbors as he rode by on his bike? Was he this kid that desperately tried to fix what he once

had, only to find that it would never be the same again?

Mike lay in Will's bed, his eyes slowly dropping shut as he watched the sky turn from dark purple to red; finally shutting them to get at least a few minutes of sleep.

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"No."

"What do you mean no," Kali whispered to El as they sat across from one another. "For once in my life I'm willing to agree with a cop." Hopper looked to the side at her with his eyebrows raised. El sat back with her arms across her chest, a mad frown forming across her face. She didn't really like the plan that was unfolding in front of her. She trusted her friends, and new beyond anything that they were smart enough to pull something like this off, but something inside of her said no.

Kali had woken about an hour before, walking into Hopper and El's conversation; willing to listen to what he had to say. El had stayed quiet for most of the exchange because she didn't want it, she didn't want to go back to him. She didn't want to see Brenner, or the lab, or even the parking lot they left behind for that matter.

"You go," El said with a little attitude, "but I will never step foot in there again." Hopper gave a sigh, sitting back in his seat and grabbing a pack of cigarettes that sat in his small shirt pocket. "I go," El said pointing to the back door, "and you make sure they get Will out." Kali shook her head.

"I can't stop those things like you can," she said. El considered this, thinking about the last time they ran into the tall lanky monster on the high way. She looked into the living room at Tory; sleeping on the couch hugging a small pillow.

"You both go," EL said throwing her thumb over her shoulder at Tory.

"What will she do Jane?" Kali looked at her, to Hopper, and then back to her again. Hopper lit his cigarette while it sat on his lips. He shrugged his shoulders at Kali like he had no interest in the

conversation. "All she's going to do is make everything worse. She throws things off balance. She can't control herself."

"She could try," El shot back. "She could do something other than sleep." The girls stared at one another for a moment. The only sound in the room were heavy breaths, and the breath Hopper let out of smoke. "She can help with Will, or maybe with the bad men." Kali shook her head for a moment, trying to wrap her head around the thought.

"Here's the deal," Kali said, sneaking a peak at Hopper from the corners of her eyes before continuing. "We didn't come here for this. We came here for you." El sat up at her words, not sure if she should be angry or not. Kali had brought this here, she had made this happen. "We are going to go through with this plan, and then the three of us," she said motioning to them and the people in the living room. "We are getting out of here."

"Hold on," Hopper said sitting up and taking his cigarette out of his mouth. "She," he said pointing at El and making full eye contact with Kali. "She not going anywhere after this is done. Her family is here, I don't care who you claim to be in her life, but she's my responsibility, and you can't just take her away." They angrily stared at one another for a minute, while El tried to hide a small smile from her lips. She could feel water form in her eyes but quickly blinked them away. She looked back to the backdoor, concentrating. She felt an itch; something at the back of her head poking her.

"She doesn't have to abide by your rules," she could hear Kali say, but didn't listen as she felt her eyes slightly closed.

"Yes she does," She could hear Hopper as his voice echoed softly in the distance.

"Jane is her own person-"

There was eerie quietness to the void she had never heard before. There was no echo, and there was no water to reflect what light she could see. As she looked through the space she could feel a push of something in her chest she couldn't make sense of. She turned in a slow circle, looking for anything that would be familiar, but only darkness showed. She could feel

a cold mist on her feet, her footsteps not making a sound as she took a slow step. She could feel something pushing back, something not wanting her to move forwards. She looked around for the source, not finding anything in her space.

"Stop," she could feel something on her shoulder. She looked over her right side, a hand placed on top of it. She slowly turned her head to see Will staring right back at her. "Don't turn around." He looked tired, slightly out of place. His hair was pressed down by sweat and grease, his eyes rimmed with red and darkness.

"You are obviously an expert source on how to live a healthy life," Hoppers loud voice rang into her ears as she snapped her eyes open. Warm blood trickled down her upper lip, a drop landing on the tiled kitchen floor.

"Oh and you are?" Kali yelled back. El quickly moved her sweater sleeve to whip her blood away. She looked at the two she sat with at the table, they chairs pushed back as they stood with anger in their eyes. El had to give it to Kali, she put some much confidence in the fact the El would go with her that she wasn't even considering any other alternative. She looked to the back door, trying to think of a way around everything. She didn't want to go back, she didn't want to go to the quarry, but she knew there was no other way. She knew that if she wanted to do what she felt was right she was going to have to make her own plan, and they would have to work around it.

Don't turn around.

What did that mean? She already knew she wasn't going back, so why would he concern himself with letting her know? Was that even him, or was it the monster talking to her?

She looked down at Mike's watch that still sat on her wrist, the time reading seven three one. She sighed, letting her head ache pound through her skull as she put a hand to her hat. She looked down the hall of the house, thinking of the time she spent with Will; how he was always quiet but caring. He had made her a hot chocolate when she had never had it before. He had treated her like a person, and never asked what it was like; to have powers the no one else did.

"I think I'm going to sleep," El said through the two loud voices. They both stopped their talking, looking down at her from where they stood. She pushed her chair out from the table, standing and turning to look into the living room. Her friends eyes were on her; Max, Dustin, and Lucas sitting up in their small floor beds and looking at her.

"Would you like some company," Max said quietly from her spot on the floor. El gave a small smile, nodding her head as she moved for the hall way. All three moved from their small made up beds on the floor, following her as she moved to Will's room.

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Hopper looked down at the paper in his hand as he watched the kids walk down the hall. He wasn't worried about getting to Curly County. It wasn't far from where they were, and the psych ward was just on the outskirts of the small town. It was getting inside, walking the halls, and getting Will out in one piece that made a small shiver fall down his back. He felt like he was back at the lab, looking at the small security screens trying to find a way out of the hell that took over their cold halls.

"Maybe I can distract them," he heard Kali say from beside him. He looked over to the girl, dark circles forming under her eyes. She looked different with a shaved head; slightly younger, and a little more innocent. "I've never really dealt with those," she waved her hands in the air trying to find her words. "Those, whatever they are, but if their like anything else that breathes maybe I can distract them." Hopper looked back down at the piece of paper, looking at the small map Mike tried to draw out from Kali's memory.

"I can deal with the humans, if you deal with the other worldly creatures." Hopper looked into the living room; Kali's friends still asleep on the floor. Tory's eyes slightly opened to look at them through the door way.

"I do not want my friends involved," Kali said, moving around the table to get a better look into the living room. "I will help you and your people, but I will be doing it for my sister." They looked at one another one last time before Kali disappeared into the living room,

leaving Hopper to think.

He didn't want El to go on her own; he didn't want her involved with any of this, but knew that without her nothing would get done. Hopper turned to the sink, the small window that sat over it showing the mixture of dark clouds and the happy sun. He looked over the trees, over the distant super cell that hung over the Earth a few miles away. He wondered what the others were thinking; if Floe had been trying to call him over the radio, if people in town were scared or just ignoring it like a bad storm.

Hopper jumped out of his skin because within the silence of the house came the ringing of the phone. He looked around the empty kitchen, slowly walking to the wall and picking up the receiving end.

"Hello," he said in a low voice.

"Hopper?" Hopper's ears perked up, the man on the other end continuing. "I told Joyce I would be there as soon as I could," Owens said, "but then I got a different call, and I thought that one was a little more important." Hopper raised his eye brows.

"Spit in out doc," Hopper said.

"I got a call from Brenner. He told me where he was and what was happening." Owens paused for a moment, giving a small cough before continuing. "I'm here with Will chief, and I need you to tell me step by step how you fixed him the first time."

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Mike felt like he was sleeping, but he heard movement all around him. He hated that moment before waking up, because sometimes he would be lying there, not able to move. He listened to the movement of everyone coming into the room, someone sat down beside him on the bed.

"How's your head," he heard Max say.

"Cold," came El's voice. Mike felt himself twitch a little, his muscle coming into the realization that they couldn't move.

"I think it looks badass," Max said back. Mike could hear everyone taking their seats on the floor or against a wall around the room. "It's real punk." Mike could feel himself grin slightly, finally lifting his eyes to the brightly lit room. His body was still facing the window, the sun finally up compared to when he had fallen asleep.

"MTV punk," El said slowly. Mike felt a shift in the bed, he turned over his bad shoulder to see El getting more comfortable by his feet. She looked over to see him staring at her, her eyebrows rising in surprise. He sat up slowly, seeing Dustin leaning against the closed door, Max on the floor, and Lucas standing right behind her.

"Time to wake up lover boy," Dustin said sitting up a little straighter. Mike rolled his eyes at him. He leaned his back against the bedframe, feeling slightly weird about being in Will's room without him being there.

"I have a plan," EL said abruptly. Everyone turned their eyes to her, but she was only staring at Mike. "I was wondering if you could help me." Mike could feel his stomach drop slightly at the thought of El coming to him for help. Just hours ago he was debating on if he was good enough to even been seen by her. "I just don't want to go alone anymore."

Mike looked around at his friends; all of them bring their attention to him. He moved a little closer to her on the bed, grabbing her hand waiting for her to talk. She looked around at her friends, and then back to Mike.

"I'm going to close the gate," she said a little quiet. "I'm going to close it today."

...

"There's no way," Axel said loudly; waving his gun in the air like it was a toy. "Why would we risk ourselves for some coper, and his band of goodie-too-shoes? We don't even know this kid." Hopper wanted to push him against the wall, maybe give him a little punch to the face. He couldn't understand it either; why Kali was okay to help them. All she wanted was to take things from him, to take her away even though she finally felt some comfort with the people in

her life.

"We," Kali began to say, motioning to all of her friends. "We aren't doing anything. You guys are going to get out of here, find a new safe location to bunk in and wait." Hopper looked around the group, their eyes brows raised.

"Kali," Mick said softly, looking to Hopper as if he could be including in what she had to say. "This is stupid, you know it is."

"They need my help," Kali looked down at her hands, then back up at her friends. "Just make sure you don't hide too deep, because I need to be able to find you when we're done." Hopper raised his head to look down the hall way from where he was standing. He looked over to the phone he had just hung up, focusing now on the words he shared with Owens.

Brenner had run, he had left them all behind in the mess he had created. Owens was going to do it, he was going to get that thing out of Will, but it was Hopper that was going to have to get them out. Their windows and doors bolted, hidden deep within the building and running out of time before those monsters where able to get to them.

Hopper shook his head at the thought, trying to find control so he could wake up Joyce. He had to get them ready, he had to prepare each other for what they were about to walk into.

...

It was weird, or at least he thought it was until he realized where he was. It was the voice that started to echo within the dark space that made him realize what was really happening. Because the last thing he could really remember was splitting pain as he lay in a bed that wasn't his own; the blaring sound of gun fire as he sat in the darkness of his mind.

Will could hear him, he could hear the familiar panicked voice of a doctor as his yelling from a far corner of the darkness. He looked around himself, seeing only black, a mist covering his eyes; he felt cold. It was almost as if he was lost, like when he was in the upside

down. He tried to hear his mother, like he would when he was looking for home, but he couldn't find her.

It was happening, he knew it was. He thought for just a little bit that he would be okay, that everything was over. Now he could really feel it; the Mind Flare looming over his conscience as he tried to place a simple thought in front of him. He was taking over, and Will couldn't do anything about it. All he could think about was his mother, and his brother. How sad they must feel now that they were really losing him. He was never going to go back; he would never be able to be Will again.

...

Hopper woke Jonathan first, telling him in hushed tones to try and find something to make for food. Jonathan's groggy eyes blinked slowly at his words as he nodded his head; moving slowly away from his mother. Hopper waited for the sound of the door clicking shut before he place a hand on Joyce's shoulder, slowly shaking her awake.

"It's time to wake up," he said softly to her. Her eyes shot open; reality coming back to her fast. She sat up quickly looking around her and then at Hopper. "We have to start moving," he said to her with a frown.

"Where Jonathan?" she asked.

"He's fine, I just have him cooking something up for everyone," he reassured her. She let out a small sigh of relief as she looked around her room. The sky was getting darker even though it was the morning, the tall looming clouds taking over their sun.

"What's it like in town?" she asked looking at her window. The blind were drawn, but they both could tell what was making the light disappear.

"I have no idea," Hopper said with a sigh, moving one hand over his fore head. "I should check in with Flo, but at this point I don't think it really matters. It's been days since I've even thought about work." Joyce put a hand on his shoulder to making him feel better. Her

touch sent an electrical current through his arm like it always did; making his mind focus back onto reality. "Owens called," he said to her in a deeper voice. "He's with Will."

...

Jonathan moved slowly through the kitchen, he stood at the fridge door for what felt like ages before moving. He took out a carton of eggs, half full, some milk; a half used onion, and sighed. They had nothing, but he had always been good at making nothing into something.

"Need some help," her voice made Jonathan freeze, forgetting he was in a house full of people, and not just making breakfast before school like he always did. He turned to see Nancy in the door way, he hair a little frizzed from sleep. She wore the same clothes from yesterday, her eyes slightly open as she was still trying to wake up.

"I can make the best toast," she said with half a smile, making him laugh softly. She slowly started to walk into the kitchen to stand beside him. "You laugh but it's true," she continued. "Just asked Holly, she thinks it's to die for."

"I'll take your word for it," he said back, moving everything from the fridge to the counter. "If you can make six eggs, some milk, and half an onion into something than I don't think you have to prove anything to me." She stared at the ingredients than back at the fridge.

"Anything in the freezer?" she asked opening the freezer door. A puff of cold air came out as she looked from side to side. Jonathan watched as she began to pulled frozen veggies, and fruit from the freezer. "We are just going to have to settle for an ore of weird foods together." She said to him placing what she found next to his findings.

"Let's get started than," Jonathan said glancing over to her with a small smile.

...

Steve sat on the couch in the living room watching Jonathan and

Nancy cook together. He felt something in his stomach; something that was mixed with jealousy and hatred, but he tried to swallow it down. He took his eyes from them, looking around the room at the outcast group. Kali sat across from him against the wall, watching him observe the group as they talked. He felt uneasy with them, mostly because they were a group of criminals and he didn't like to associate himself with low life like that.

"You judge so quickly," he heard Kali say across from him. He looked at her with a frown, annoyed that he had to talk so early in the morning.

"And you don't," he said back to her, sinking deeper into the seat. She raised her eye brows at him, but he paid no mind to her as he looked back to the kitchen. He moved his bat around in his hand, thinking about the time him and Nancy made cookies for a bake sale at school. He had only been there to eat the dough as she worked, and to make a mess of things to make her laugh. He let the lump in his throat fall as he swallowed at the thought.

"Maybe you should do something more productive with your time," Kali said back to him. "I don't think watching will get you anywhere."

"I'll do whatever I want with my time," Steve bit back. "Maybe you should start to think of a way to get Will out of the building, and do a little less sitting around yourself."

"I have a plan," she said sitting up from the wall. "Maybe if you were awake when it was being forged you would know about it."

"Yeah sorry about that," Steve said through his teeth. "I was doing this thing all night last night called watching our backs. I don't know if you noticed but I was the one sitting by the door while everyone else had a good night's rest." He gripped his bat a little tighter as they glared at one another, the others in the room going quiet.

"Poor little rich boy," she said through her teeth. He stood at her words, growling under his breath. She stood with him, her eyes giving a shine that wasn't there before. "Must be hard not getting what you want." Steve could see the room getting slightly darker, the corner of his vision not focusing on anything around him. He could

smell something that wasn't there before as he stared at the girl; the smell of a cigar, like his dad's office.

He felt a shiver run down his spine as he looked around himself, the walls melting like wax and turning into the painted gray walls of his home. He was standing at his front door, the stairs to his house on his right. He gave a big swallow as he listened to his dad talk loudly from the living room, he could see his mother sitting on the couch in the distance.

"He's not going anywhere," he father said. "He won't even take my advice on staying in town, and God only knows how he's going to get into a school with the grades he has." Steve looked down at his hands as he felt the guilt run through him. "I can't believe this is happening, I can't believe this is how he turned out." Steve backed himself against the front door, moving to leave, but something caught on his legs and he fell backward. He closed his eyes before the impact; feeling himself fall onto a soft cushion.

"Stop," he heard a girl say from behind him before he opened his eyes. He was back in the Byers living room, half lying on the couch. He turned his head back to the voice, Tory's face coming into view as she moved into the room. "Don't feed off my anger," she said quietly to Kali. Steve turned back to her, not knowing how to concentrate when his mind was still reeling on his father's words.

"Then don't force them on me," Kali said through her teeth. Both girls looked at one another with dagger like glares. Steve half laid on the couch looking back and forth, his eyes a little wide. He sat up quickly grabbing his bat that had fallen on the floor. He looked between both girls, then around the room at their friends. He decided to leave it at that, not wanting to be in the same room as them anymore. He would much rather be cooking with Nancy and Jonathan in the kitchen.

...

"If I have her with me maybe that will give me enough to close the gate," El said from her place on the bed. Mike walked around the room thinking, Lucas and Dustin watching him.

"I'm still confused on what she can do," Max said to her from the

floor. "I mean, she controls emotions I guess, but how does that help you?"

"She had anger," Mike said stopping next to the bed. "She's been messing with a few of us in the house. Yesterday I felt so mad; I don't think I can even describe what it was like."

"Anger can help me," El said, everyone looking back to her. "When I went to Chicago Kali told me that when I focus my energy on emotion my power gets stronger. When I closed the gate I focused on all the things that made me mad, that's how I closed it."

"I don't think she's going to want to go with us," Lucas said from his spot on the wall. "I mean she doesn't really do much but sit there, and all she really seems interested in is staying out of everything."

"Maybe she doesn't have to want to go," Dustin said. He scratched his head in thought. "Maybe we take her without her permission."

"We kidnap her?" Max said with wide eyes. "Yeah, sorry I'm not doing that."

"She would be madder," Mike said looking to Dustin. They both nodded their head at the thought. "I mean we would have to be really careful, she could make us turn on one another."

"But all that anger could feed into El closing the gate," Lucas said, sitting up from the wall."

"Uh guys!" Max said loudly.

"The only thing we would have to worry about was getting to the quarry with her, and potential monsters."

"Guys!"

"We have El for that."

"Hello!"

"She needs to conserve her energy."

"I'm not doing this," Max said loudly, standing from her spot on the floor. The boys stopped their talking, looking at the red head as they looked at every one of them. "You're talking about kidnapping someone with the ability to turn your emotions into a fire ball!" El looked at the girl, picturing all her friends fighting one another when they aren't even halfway to the quarry.

"Let me handle it," EL said, standing from her seat. "I'll talk to her." Max let out a stressed sigh.

"What's the escape plan," Max said, sitting back on the floor and looking at the three boys.

...

Hopper sat at the kitchen table, Joyce on one side of him and Steve on the other. Kali sat across from them, drawing lines on a fresh piece of paper. She stopped mid line, tapping the pencil in thought.

"I'm about ninety percent sure this is where his room was," kali said, drawing a space for a door way then continuing with the hall way layout. She stared the door way space looking up to the other three she sat with. "Hopefully they are still keeping him there."

"Owens probably moved him to a more interior area," Hopper said. "Do you know of any room that was far from windows and outside doorways?" Kali bit her lip in thought. Go through her memory once again as they sat; waiting. Hopper listened to Jonathan curse under his breath, moving a pan from the stove top as Nancy covered a steaming pan.

"There was a room they brought me to." She said slowly. "It was big, with a tank." She closed her eyes at the thought. "It's underground, I'm sure that's where they would go."

"Then that's what we aim for," Hopper said to everyone. "Joyce and Jonathan bring the heaters, me and Nancy will have the gun power, Steve keeping the back with his bat, and you," he points to kali, "you lead the way, and distract when you can." They all nodded in unison.

"What about El," Joyce asked softly.

"She won't go," Hopper sighed. He didn't know what to tell her, he just knew he wasn't going to let her leave this house. "I'll talk to Wheeler, make sure the kids keep her here." He looked around the kitchen in thought; glancing at the small cabinets on the other side of the room. A small syringe sat on the wooden top, black liquid filling it half way. Mike had taken the dart from the cabin; the one Brenner had shot her with. "Maybe," he said slowly. "Maybe we can make sure she doesn't leave at all."

...

"Their probably still in his pocket," El said looking to Max.

"I think I might be able to get them, we just need a distraction. He's a cop; he probably knows what it feels like to be pit pocketed."

"As long as we get the keys who cares." Dustin said sitting down on the bed with a sigh. "We are literally walking into death right now, we need a ride out."

"I think I know where the area is," Lucas from the wall. Mike continued to pace in thought as they talked. "It's like a ten minute walk to the trail, we'll probably be caring El back, but that's the only place I could think of his truck being."

"Then we head there," Mike said. "We move fast and we keep our minds focused." He walked over to El, leaning onto his knee in front of her. "Are you sure about this?" He asked seriously locking eyes with her.

"I can do this," she said to him. "I have to do this." A soft knock came to Will's door making them all jump in unison. Lucas came off the wall, opening the door to Nancy.

"There's some food," she said quietly, looking to all of them. Her face showing some sort of emotion that El couldn't place. Her and Nancy locked eyes, Nancy's eyes drifting away quickly.

Dustin stood with force, stomping to the door, Lucas and Max following suit; Mike staying in his place, El doing the same. The thought of food made her stomach turn.

"We'll be right out," Mike said to his sister. She nodded her head, cracking the door before walking back to the kitchen. Mike looked at the door for a moment before looking back to Will. "Promise me you're going to be fine." El had watched enough soaps and movies to know that happy endings never amounted to anything in real life. She knew that promising him anything wouldn't do them any good, and she knew that at the end of all of this she didn't know if she would be walking away.

"I promise," she lied to him. She looked down at her hands in her lap, feeling tears cover her eyes, not letting them slip past the lids. Mike grabbed one of her hands with his good arm, standing from his spot on the floor.

"Then let's eat," he said, pulling her from her spot on the bed and leading her out of the door.

...

Mike could feel it, the pressure in his chest as he took a seat at the table. The all too familiar feels from a month before when they had closed the gate for the first time. He looked around to everyone, Kali's crew missing; where they had gone, he didn't really care.

Mrs. Byers placed a small plate in front of him, a little bit of eggs and veggies stacked next to each other, one piece of toast cut in half.

"Nancy didn't make the toast right?" Mike said picking up the crusty bread and inspecting it. He looked to El who took a seat next to him at the small table. "Nancy makes the worst toast."

"Do not," Nancy said from across the room, nudging Jonathan who tried to hold in his laughter. Joyce moved a small plate in front of EL, who just frowned down at it.

"I'm not hungry," she said softly to Mrs. Byers.

"At least drink this," Hopper said from the kitchen counter. He placed a small plate next to his empty chair, handing over a red drink to her, frost building up in the side of the glass. El grabbed it and frowned; looking it over in confusion. "It's strawberry's, but all grinded up into

a drink. I put some pain medicine in there so it might taste a little funny, but it'll make you feel better." She nodded her head, looking over to Mike.

"You should drink it," Mike said lowly as everyone else began to dig into their small plate of food. "You're going to need it." Hopper cleared his throat at Mike's words; stuffing a full fork of eggs into his mouth.

"Here's the deal," Hopper said, looking down to his plate and then back at Mike. "You kids are staying here," he pointed his fork at the line of kids that sat in front of them. "Kali and the rest of us are going to Will, Owens is there now trying to assess the situation." Mike looked over to his friends, all of the looking down at their food. He looked back up to Hopper. "You need to promise me that she does not leave this house." Mike and Hopper both looked to El he took a gulp of her drink, frowning down at it as she forced herself to swallow.

"What about the gate," Mike asked looking to Hopper. He wasn't going to promise anything, only because he knew the plan, and they were going to stick to it.

"We are dealing with Will first," Hopper said in a harsh dad voice. "We'll figure out the gate later, but I don't want a repeat of last month. That shit wasn't good for her, and she's too banged up now to put herself into that kind of situation again." Mike looked to El, who tried not to make eyes contact with anyone in the room, her lips returning to the glass, taking another gulp with disgust.

"Yeah sure," Mike said softly.

"Tory staying with you guys," kali said. They all looked to her and then to Tory who quietly played with the food on her plate. "She's still too weak, and without having control over her power I would hate to bring her into a situation that can blow things out of proportion."

"What a good idea," max said under her breath. Lucas nudged her leg with his own. Mike took a few bites of his toast, swallowing the dry bread while lost in thought. Maybe she was too weak; maybe closing the gate would take her this time. He thought about the first time she

disappeared. She got lost in the upside down because she didn't really know what she was doing, what if that happened again; except this time she didn't get lost, she just never woke up again.

His thoughts were stopped by the sound of glass breaking next to him. He looked to El with alarm as she fell from her chair, her eyes opening and closing slowly. She crawled slowly away from the table as Hopper stood from his chair. She looked over to the drink and then to Hopper who rushed around the table to get to her. Mike stood from his seat, looking at the smoothing like drink, most of it already drank; the rest spread on the floor with broken glass.

"It's okay," Hopper said to her as he kneeled in front of her. She brought in a deep breath, trying to move away from him, before he eyes closed. Hopper caught her head before it landed on the tile floor. Mike kneeled next to him, while everyone else either looked surprised, or sat with guilt in their chairs.

"What did you do?" Mike asked with anger as he looked up to Hopper. The man shook his head, picking the girl up from the floor.

"I'm not stupid kid," Hopper said to him, standing in the kitchen with El in his arms. Mike looked to his friends, their eyes wide. Max stood from her seat, moving next to them.

"Let me help you get her to bed," she said slowly to Hopper. Hoppers eyebrows frowned in confusion, but accepted the offer with a head nod anyway. Mike stood in shock as they moved down the hall, back to Wills room.

"Mike, don't be mad," Nancy said as she ushered him into the living room.

"Don't be mad?" he said loudly. "You guys drugged her with something that takes he powers away, of course I'm mad." He put his hands to his face, hissing in irritation and pain from his left shoulder.

"We're not stupid Mike," Nancy said. "She was going to go and close the gate, we all know she was." Mike stood in silence looking to Nancy with squinted eyes. "You all were going to get yourself killed by just getting close to that thing," Nancy lifted her arm to the ceiling

as if the clouds floated through the room. "We'll get that things closed, we just need to focus on getting Will back first, and don't you want him to be okay." Mike turned around, looking around the room.

Of course he wanted Will to be okay, but they had gotten to a point now, a point of no return. Sometimes the good guys die, and sometimes you can never get them back. All Mike knew was that the Mind Flair was out, and people could be in real danger if El doesn't close the gate. He turned back to look at his sister, biting his lip and shaking his head.

"I don't think you know what you just did," he said lowly. "Of course I want my best friend back," he said through tears, "but what about the others, what about Hawkins? The Mind Flair is looming over our town, our family, we have to get the gate closed." He pushed pasted his sister, knocking into Hopper in the door way, Max slowly coming from behind the large man, slight fear in her eyes. She looked around the living room awkwardly, making eye contact with Mike before turning back to the kitchen and taking her seat next to Lucas.

Hopper placed a hand on Mike's right shoulder leading him to the hall way and towards Will's room.

"You will stay here," Hopper said, leading him to El's bed side, "and you will make sure she stays safe until we get back with Will." Mike looked up at the man with cold eyes; like they ever listen to any adult.

"I hope you know what you just did," Mike said to him with venom. "She trusted you."

"I'll do whatever to keep her alive," he said, looking over to El. Mike shook his head, as Hopper stomped out of the room.

...

Lucas sat at the table, his eyes glued to his plate of food which he hadn't really touched. He listened to everyone stand from their chairs, Dustin and Max staying seated next to him. Mrs. Byers took a few empty plates from the table, Steve sneezed Dustin's shoulder before disappearing into the living room, Kali looked at them her

dark eyes.

They all watched as everyone slowly left the room, Kali staying behind with them. Tory looked to the girl, behind looking at the others with a scroll and disappearing to the bathroom down the hall.

"She response great to fear," Kali said with a small voice. Lucas and the others looked up to her in confusion. "El," she said trying to help them understand. Lucas looked to Dustin who shrugged his shoulders at him. Kali let out a frustrated sigh, "El works well under pressure. If you get her awake, I have strong faith that she would be able to do it." Lucas raised his eyebrows at her. Honestly he thought El could do anything, he wasn't too worried about her ability to close the gate or not, it was their ability to get there that made him fearful. "Just make sure she's away before you get there." Kali took one last look at them before walking to the living room.

"She gives me weird vibes," Max said shaking out shivers in her body. Lucas and Dustin looked to her. He had almost forgotten she had gone with Hopper to help lay El down.

"Did you get them?" He asked looking around their surroundings and then back at her. She looked around herself before patting her jean pocket.

"Grabbed them when he was leaning over her," she gave a small smile, which quickly disappeared as Hopper stomped into the kitchen. He looked at all three of them with a sigh.

"Don't even think about stepping foot out of this house," he said pointing his figure at all of them. "We'll walkie you once we make it back a into city limit which isn't too far from her; you understand." All three of them slowly nodded their heads as Hopper looked into the living room. Lucas could see Jonathan stuffing a second heater into a back pack, while his mother walked down the hallway with her own back, walking into Will's room to get a few things. Nancy placed the small wooden gun onto the couch, looking at the big black one Hopper had brought in. Steve stood with his bat, looking down at his watch.

To Lucas it was like they were getting ready for war, he guessed

because that's what they were really doing. It reminded him of the stories his dad was tell about the war, going into Nom without know what awaited them beyond their war ships; what awaited them beyond the trees.

...

Mike looked out of Will's window, watching as everyone stuffed themselves into Steve's small car; Nancy sitting in Jonathans lap in the back seat. He looked back to the unconscious El, his brain freezing as he tried to figure out what to do.

"Okay," Dustin said, opening the door wide, holding a large bottle of ammonia. "Let's get this party started." Mike looked from him to El, then down to the bottle of chemicals. Dustin fished through his jean pocket, pulling out a cotton ball, and untwisting the cap of the ammonia bottle.

"Wait," Mike said. "What about Hoppers car keys? How are we going to get Tory to come if El never got to talk to her?" Dustin placed the cotton ball on top of the bottle, twisting it upside down fast and moving it far away from him. He took in a big breath.

"This stuff stinks," Dustin said, moving closer to the bed. "Max got the keys when Hopper brought El to lay down, and I don't know what we're going to do about the girl yet, but I'm sure we can over power her."

"Dude," Mike said twisting his face in discussed.

"What," Dustin said. "We're talking about kidnapping here, no matter what I say it will come out sounding creepy." Dustin leaned over El, placing the wet cotton ball under her nose. Mike leaned over on the other side of the bed, waiting for her eyes to pop open like Will's had about a month ago.

Nothing happened.

Mike looked to Dustin with a frown, as Dustin removed the cotton ball away from her nose. They both looked down at the girl, both lost in thought on what else they could do to wake her up. Dustin put the

chemical bottle on the floor, grabbing El shoulders. He shook her hard.

"El!" he yelled in her face. "Hello." Mike grabbed Dustin, pulling him off of her.

"Stop," he complained. "Maybe this stuff is supposed to keep her asleep. Maybe we should give her a little bit before heading out."

"It'll take us an hour to get there by foot," Dustin said shaking his head. "Plus there might be some obstacles to get there, we need to go now." Mike gave a sigh, looking back down at El and then to the bedroom door. He moved past the bed, glancing back at Dustin before walking out into the hall way.

Lucas and Max stood in the kitchen, Lucas looking at big Kitchen knives as Max rolled her eyes at something he said. Mike looked at them for a second, wishing it could be so easy for him. He closed his eyes only for a moment, imagining what it would be like to have El in his life as if she was normal. He shook his head from the thought, moving down the hall way to get into the living room.

Tory sat on the couch, and as soon as Mike was able to lock eyes with her she did the same with him. He took a deep breath in the spot that he stood, not knowing what to say or how to phrase it.

"We're leaving," he said, scrunching his eyebrows because he hadn't planned on saying that.

"Okay," the girl said back to him.

"Well," he paused for a moment, feeling his stomach drop slightly. How do you tell a person their going to be kidnapped? "You're coming with us." He said plainly, moving a little closer to where she sat.

"I'm not going anywhere," she said sitting up straight. "I'm staying here like I was asked." Mike rolled his eyes at her words because they came out with a mocking attitude. He glanced behind him as if he didn't want anyone else hear what he was going to say next.

"I don't think you understand," Mike said. "You're coming with us,

even if we have to take you by force."